

HELSINKI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS (HSE)  
Department of Management



**CUSTOMER-FOCUSED WEBSITE AS A BRANDING AND IMPRESSION  
MANAGEMENT TOOL**

**Case: Haaga Institute Polytechnic**

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**ASIAKASLÄHTÖINEN WEBSIVUSTO MERKKITUOTTEEN HALLINNAN JA VAIKUTTAVUUDEN VÄLINEENÄ****Case: Haaga Instituutin ammattikorkeakoulu**

Ammattikorkeakoulut Suomessa saavat vuotuisen summan euroja opiskelijaa kohden. Tällä summalla tulee järjestää opetus ja lisäksi hankkia uusia hakijoita. Web-sivusto on houkutteleva kanava. Korkeakouluja arvioidaan myös usein web-sivustojen perusteella: niiden laatu ja puoleensavetävyys kuvaavat tulevia opintoja.

**Tutkimuksen tavoitteet**

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tarkastella kuinka merkkituotteen hallinta ja vaikuttamisen johtamisen teoria tehdään asiakkaisiin kohdistetun web-sivuston avulla non-profit-organisaatioissa. Toiseksi tämä tutkimus hahmottaa ne syyt, miksi on välttämätöntä huomioida minkälaista markkinointiviestintää kohdennetaan Haaga Instituutin ammattikorkeakoulun kohderyhmälle - 20-24 -vuotiaille.

**Tutkimusaineisto ja analyysimenetelmä**

Empiirinen osa toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena eli laadullisena tutkimuksena. Tutkimusmenetelmänä oli case-tutkimus ja aineistonkeruu tehtiin fokus-ryhmähaastattelulla. Haastattelu toteutettiin GroupSystems® -tutkimuksena Helsingin Kauppakorkeakoulussa keväällä 2004. Tutkimukset tehtiin kahdessa osassa (erikseen Haaga Instituutin ja Perhon opiskelijoille) Analysointimetodi oli kvalitatiivinen sisältöanalyysi ryhmitellyistä kysymyksistä (taustakysymykset, fokus-ryhmäkysymykset ja palautekysymykset).

**Tutkimuksen tulokset**

Tutkimus osoitti, että merkkituotteen identiteetin hallinta on muutakin kuin kyseisen yrityksen logon tunnistamista. Vahva merkkituote on sellainen jolla on olemassa oleva maine. Myös ammattikorkeakoulu erottuu web-sivuston kautta. Web-sivustolla on merkittävä asema nuorten tiedonhaussa. Ihanteellinen web-sivusto sisältää sopivassa suhteessa tietoa ja houkuttelevuutta. Odotusten tulee kohdata ja lupauksien täyttyä opintojen aikana. Tämän vuoksi on tärkeää huomioida kohderyhmä ennen web-sivuston suunnittelua. Web-sivusto ei ole erillinen media, vaan integroitu osa korkeakoulujen markkinointia ja viestintää.

**Avainsanat**

Merkkituote, merkkituotetietoisuus, merkkituotteen rakentaminen, maine, markkinointi, vaikuttamisen johtaminen, imago, ammattikorkeakoulu, web-sivusto



**CUSTOMER-FOCUSED WEBSITE AS A BRANDING AND IMPRESSION  
MANAGEMENT TOOL**

**Case: Haaga Institute Polytechnic**

In Finland, polytechnics receive an annual amount of euros per student. With this amount they are required to organize the studies and find new applicants. The website is an attractive recruitment channel. Higher education institutions are often evaluated via their websites: as are the quality and the attractiveness of the studies.

**Objective of the Research**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the theory of branding and impression management, especially from the customer focused website point of view in the non-profit sector. Secondly this study tries to understand the reason why it is essential to take into account the marketing communication in Haaga Institute Polytechnic utilized for the main target segment in higher education – the age group of 20- 24 year olds.

**Research and Analysis Methods**

The empirical study was qualitative research. The research was done as a single case study and by using focus group interviews. This study was conducted with the aid of GroupSystems® at the Helsinki School of Economics. Two focus group meetings were held (one for Haaga Institute and one for Perho Culinary School students) for the matching age segment. The analysis method was qualitative content analysis of the grouped questions (background questions, focus groups questions and feedback questions)

**Findings of the Study**

The study demonstrates that brand identity management is more than identifying the logo of the company in question. The power of reputation of the brand is strongest when polytechnic degree programmes are reachable via a website. The website plays an important role in young people's information searches. The ideal website should be a balance between the information given and the attractiveness. The expectations should be met and the promises should be fulfilled throughout the studies. That is why it is essential to take into account the target market's prior to preparing the website. The website is no more a separate media, but an integral part of higher education's marketing and communication.

**Key Words**

Brand, Brand Awareness, Brand Building, Reputation, Marketing, Impression Management, Image. Polytechnic, Website,



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Higher education institutions and marketing traditions in Finland**

Finding gifted and motivated individuals to recruit as polytechnic level students has been, and will be, one of the most difficult and challenging tasks for polytechnics in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The number of young people is diminishing and the structure of age groups is changing very rapidly. Political decision-making is emphasizing a market driven higher education structure. Both polytechnics and universities are fighting over the best candidates. These non-profit organizations have a clear need to strengthen their marketing efforts but with reduced marketing resources.

Results-driven achievements among polytechnics and universities have increased interest in finding the best quality student body. The aim for these higher education institutions is to effectively and efficiently find those potential students. These candidates should succeed both in their studies and later, in business life itself.

Marketing communication to attract potential students has increased and changed over the years. The nature of information related to future study places has taken on marketing oriented features. Brand and image have both gained an important position among young people. They can be influenced by an effective and well-planned marketing communication by polytechnics and universities.

In the pre-information or pre-Internet-era, the options were rather limited: to place expensive advertisements in local and nationwide newspapers or to just trust in the reputation and attractiveness of a particular polytechnic or university through word-of-mouth information. Unlike any other form of marketing, a website enables direct communication with customers. Building their trust and long-term commitment is another challenge. A website can have many strategic goals. It can act as an information resource for a company. As a marketing, acquisition and customer communication tool, a website can have a substantial impact on how a company is

perceived by its customers or potential customers, such as students.

The website is now regarded as a potential recruitment channel. Its cost is minimal, the response is almost instantaneous, and it easily emerges as the recruiting channel of the future. A study made in the year 2000 by Lipman Hearne Inc, a Chicago based consulting company, proves that American high school students (10 000 participated in the survey) feel that the quality and attractiveness of a college or university can be evaluated from the website. This study also confirmed that higher education institutions are behind the times. Most of them were clinging to traditional marketing techniques e.g. multicolour brochures. The same consulting company revealed that a college website is a metaphor for the institution. Many students concluded that if the website doesn't function or appeal the school doesn't have its act together. (Weinstein, 2000)

This phenomenon may give the polytechnics and universities an effective channel to recruit gifted, potential students. People now expect websites to be like magazines or TV programmes. They expect content to be instantly attractive, personally valuable, quick to read, up to date and entertaining – and if it's not they leave and don't come back.

The Internet is no longer a novelty. It is a place of serious interaction and communication with potential customers. They expect the website to completely represent the organization in question.

Innovative polytechnics and universities should be waking up to the fact that successful brands are built by people. Creative employees build brands; they are not born automatically. Committed and well-built partnerships are essential; a "relationship du jour" does not exist. Higher education in Finland needs visionary leaders and should avoid those with a short-term focus. The brand can be only as strong as the sum of the relationships with the members of the brand community.

Website marketing communication in the educational sector is fairly new in Finland and only a few studies in this field exist. The most recent study published by the



Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration (SEFE) concentrated only on university level and one particular advertising campaign. (Näckel, 2003) Studies at the polytechnic level, and especially hospitality management in Finland, are hard to find.

## 1.2 Objective of the study and research problem

The aim of this study is to examine the marketing communication of Haaga Institute Polytechnic in Helsinki, Finland, and how the brand can be identified and strengthened on the website. The study aims to determine if the website is reflected in the brand awareness of the potential students. The website of this particular polytechnic will see a transformation in the near future and for that reason this study was made.

The author is employed at Haaga Institute Polytechnic as Director of the degree programme in English: hotel, restaurant and tourism management. She is involved in the development of the website and uses it as an important marketing tool to recruit potential students, both in Finland and from abroad. For these reasons, the author's own experience and observation play an important role in this study.

The aim is to discover the factors and features that trigger young people to select a particular study place. In order to clarify the factors and influences on the research problem the following topics will be discussed:

- What kind of marketing channel is the website?
- How does the website deliver awareness and loyalty to the brand?
- What impressions do people form from website visits?
- What dimensions of customer-focused communication does the website contribute?

The objective of the **theoretical part** is to present the background of the research problem and factors related to the topic under research. The **empirical part** will examine and clarify the fundamentals. The objective of the empirical part is to test

the framework based on the theoretical part. Thus, how a website can build customer focused communication with potential students.

The results will give Haaga Institute Polytechnic's views on how potential and existing students see the website as a marketing channel. The task is to determine what kind of information the website should include in order to attract the most motivated potential students, and to deliver the promised message in a credible and trustworthy way without causing disappointment after the selection of the study place.

### **1.3 Structure of the study**

In the theory part, the marketing of higher education and brand related issues are discussed. Further, the impression management makes when selecting the study field, and how the place is described, will be discussed. Finally, what are the main elements, which influence a young person's vocational education choice? The education sector is part of the non-profit organizations and for that reason; non-profit marketing term is utilized in this study.

This study will investigate the special features of website marketing, which is not just transforming a brand to the website but also to understanding the nature of a brand by the characteristics of the brand promise. The brand building process includes the following areas: research, brand personality, brand positioning and follow-up.

Chapter 2 will discuss first the key features of the Finnish education system. The use of the website as a marketing tool in the education field will be presented. Also, in this chapter non-profit marketing, brand building on the website and the definitions of the brand are introduced.

Chapter 3 will examine impression management; how the branding of the website is built, created and maintained successfully.

Chapter 4 will introduce a historical perspective of polytechnics in Finland and case study company Haaga Institute Polytechnic. The selection criteria and the image of



Haaga Institute are discussed in this chapter. The background information of the current student body and intake of the students are presented.

Chapter 5 will introduce the research method and the way in which the data was collected.

Chapter 6 will describe the results of the research. Among others, the interest in entrepreneurship, information sources of polytechnic studies prior to the application, motivation, reasons for choosing a particular vocational sector, image and reputation of the field are discussed. The information sources and channels were identified and how they served the purpose for the decision making process.

Chapter 7 will include the final discussion of the findings. This chapter also gives suggestions for improvement.

#### **1.4 Main definitions in the study**

The following terms are used in the study. The purpose is to clarify the meaning of each of these terms.

##### **Brand**

The brand is one of the most comprehensive and valuable elements of any company or organization. It is the driving force behind the business and should be continually influenced by the company. The value of well-known and respected brands to firms is clear. (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998).

##### **Website brand**

The Internet is a dynamic environment that gives involvement in the brand experience through an interactive way of building trust and value in the brand. In the Internet space, branding means creating a great user experience.

Website branding moves beyond logo, tagline, key messages and graphic identity into the customer's real-time interaction with the brand, for the entirety of the online experience. (Aaker, 2000)

### **Brand awareness**

Brand awareness is the proportion of target customers that recall a brand. Brand awareness is a common measure of marketing communications' effectiveness. Unaided awareness is spontaneous; aided or prompted awareness is when the name is recognised among others that are listed or identified. (Keller, 1998)

### **Brand association on website**

The associations include perceptions of brand quality and attitudes toward the brand. Brand associations are anything linked in memory to a brand. The user knows that a site usually provides certain qualities; if the user likes these qualities, then it will probably be worth visiting more pages on that site. (Aaker, 1996)

### **Image**

Image is everything about the company: the packaging, the uniforms, the letterhead, the advertising, the way the phone is answered, the public projects it undertakes, the environmental ideology, the legal record, the service record, the response time to customers' requests. It is the voice to the customers, the employees, the shareholders or owners. The image, if it is a good one, goes a long way toward creating a reserve of goodwill. (Swartz, 1999)

### **Reputation of the website**

The word of mouth about a quality website is spread among website users so that they eventually follow the advice of other users. The benefits that follow from a well organized website to the organization are: an enhanced reputation, a better visibility and an ability to reach people around the world. (Miller, 2003)



## **2. MARKETING AND BRANDING IN FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION**

To position higher education establishments, such as Finnish polytechnics, among the leaders in education is a very demanding task. All polytechnics aim to create a positive impression. But just creating is not sufficient; maintenance of a positive image is one of the primary objectives.

It is necessary for polytechnics in Finland to recognize the importance of utilizing communication technology, especially the Internet, in addition to other marketing strategies, to promote its brand and increase enrolment numbers. The importance of the Internet is affirmed as an effective tool for communicating with the target public, the potential students.

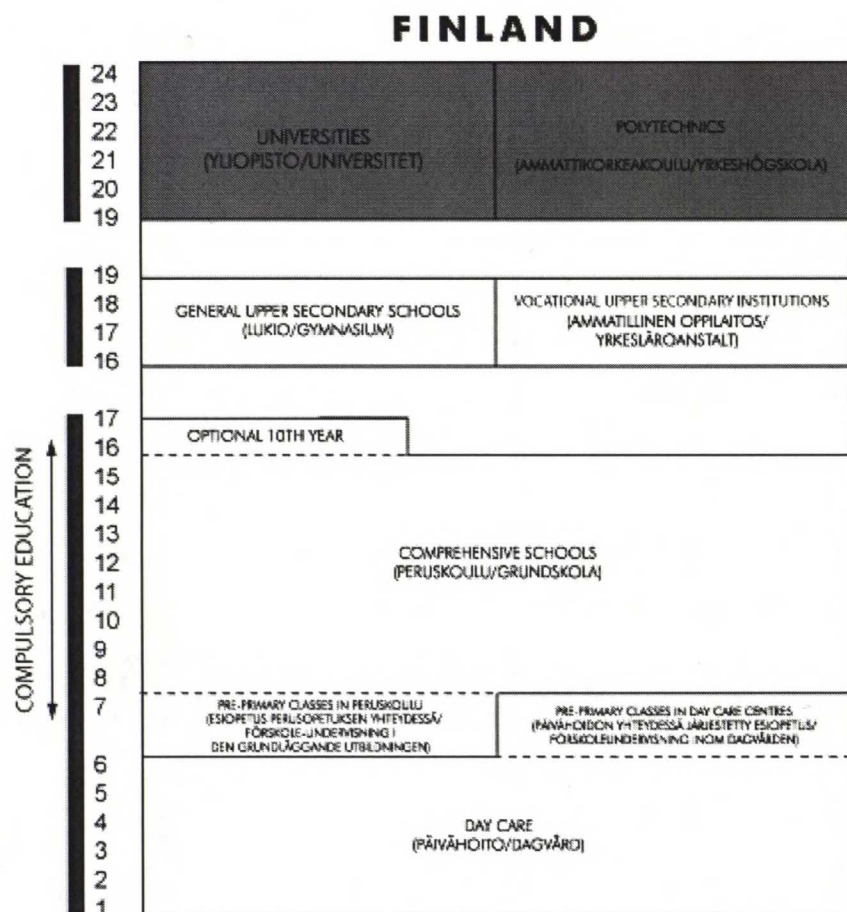
The following section will describe the theory of non-profit marketing and branding in higher education. The traditions in the marketing of higher education services are not old and marketing communication activities differ from the business sectors. The same media is utilized but the aim is to attract motivated students to apply and later graduate in norm-time.

### **2.1 Key features of the Finnish education system**

Higher education in Finland is a representative of the non-profit sector. Education in Finland is free of charge for all students. It is also regarded as a public service, non-profit sector and this feature differentiates it from other traditional marketing communication. The purpose of marketing communication among polytechnics used to concentrate on image building in competition with the universities.

Polytechnics are often compared to universities as lower level higher education institutions. The Finnish higher education system consists of two sectors: polytechnics and universities. Polytechnics are more practical oriented, educating their students for expert and development positions and jobs. The basic mission of

universities on the other hand is to carry out research and provide education based on it. (Ministry of Education, 2004)



**Figure 1 Education system in Finland (Ministry of Education, 2004)**

In Finland there are 20 universities, ten of which are multi-discipline universities. The remaining ten are art academies or institutions specialising in one or several fields. In addition, the higher education system in Finland consists of 31 polytechnics; of which two offer education only in Swedish. Most of the polytechnics are multidisciplinary, regional institutions, which give particular weight to contacts with business and industry.

Polytechnics were developed as part of the national and international higher education community, with special emphasis on their close relationships to working life and its development. In 23 polytechnics Tourism, Catering and Institutional Management is offered. (List of polytechnics appendix 2)



The majority of the students are from the age group 20-24. Usually, young people graduate from high school at age of 19.

Year	Age group	Studying	%	Polytechnic	%	Age group size
2002	20-24	169 028	51.6	71 200	21.7	327 262
2001	20-24	162 020	49.7	67 065	20.6	325 599
2000	20-24	161 824	49.5	62 801	19.1	327 230

**Table 1 Age groups 20-24 studying in higher education** (Statistics Finland, 2004)

In 2002, 21.7% of the age group 20-24 was already studied in polytechnics. The corresponding figure in universities was 48%. These figures will most likely increase in the future, as the intention of the Ministry of Education is to have 75 % of the age group in the higher education system. (Vartia & Ylä-Anttila, 2003)

The table 1 illustrates that in the year 2002 the age group 20-24 accounted for 51. 6% of the whole student body in higher education both in universities and polytechnics. This was an increase from the previous two years, 2001 and 2000, when the number of students represented approximately 49% of the student body.

All the above should be borne in mind when choosing the optimum way to communicate with potential students. Education has been proven to be a good investment; it increases income and protects against unemployment.

Sector	Students (in degree programme)	Completed degrees	Average graduation time (years)
Natural resources	4 316	665	4
Technology and communication	42 048	5 147	4,2
Business and administration	35 131	5786	3,9
Tourism, catering and institutional management	7 806	1 159	3,9
Health care and social sciences	25 109	6 124	3,4
Culture	9 120	1 137	3,9
Humanities and education	2 634	362	3,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>126 206</b>	<b>20 380</b>	<b>3,8</b>

**Table 2 Polytechnic students by study sector 2002** (Ministry of Education AMKOTA database, 2004)

The table 2 illustrates the number of students studying in polytechnics in Finland; the degrees completed and the average graduation time. The graduation time in Tourism, Catering and Institutional Management is one month above the average.

The table shows the distribution of students per study sector in Finland. The most popular is the technology and communication sector. This sector also has the highest average graduation time.

## **2.2 Use of the website as a marketing tool in higher education**

According to Winter, Saunders and Hart (2003) websites should be considered as “electronic storefronts”. They also claim that websites are so-called public work areas providing frames of symbolic representations that create an impression of the company in question. They add that the advantages of the websites are not sufficiently utilized. (Winter et al., 2003)

Instant response and personalized information are essentials when companies and organization are competing for customers. Websites enable the use of mass dialogues. Website marketing should show how to utilize the website to target customers and create and implement marketing plans. The foundations (whens, wheres & hows) of how the websites are assisting marketing practitioners in the essential tasks of gathering, evaluating and applying marketing intelligence. That is the most essential of the intelligence of Internet marketing. (Forrest, 2000)

Websites encompass e-mail marketing, banner advertising visual marketing, link exchanges, etc. Website marketing is thus a very broad field and it can be used to promote brand awareness for brick and mortar companies, or it can be used to drive traffic to a website. (Hanson, 2000)

Websites can be utilized as traditional media: advertising, image creating, brand building, direct marketing etc. A successful marketing includes integration and knowledge of its special features. Thus, what works in traditional marketing communication will not necessarily work on the website. (Hoffman & Novak, 1996) In the following section these special features of marketing will be discussed.

## **2.3 Building reputation in education by using the website**

Reputation and credibility are familiar concepts in marketing. Examples include



whether to believe the product or service claims made by a company's advertising. Reputation is the estimation of the consistency over time of an attribute of an entity. This estimation is based on the entity's ability to perform an activity repeatedly in a similar fashion. An attribute is some specific part of the entity - price, quality, and marketing skills.

The possibility exists of attributes being highly correlated (carry-over effect); for example, a company's price reputation and its quality reputation tend to move in the same direction and both are simultaneously either positive or negative. This is not to say that attribute independence does not exist, but high correlations between attributes are certainly possible. Reputation is an aggregate composite of all previous transactions over the life of the entity, a historical notion, and requires consistency of an entity's actions over a prolonged time. Reputation is established by the flow of information from one user to another. Therefore, transactions between the entity and other parties must have occurred in order for a reputation to be established. (Taylor, 2003)

Reputation, though, is an imperfect attribute since there is always a time-lag effect. Reputation is always most timely just after the latest transaction; the attitude toward the next transaction is dependent on the prior attitude and its accuracy decays with the time between transactions.

The concept of reputation depends on a user's initial beliefs and its observation of a company's past behaviour. By providing accurate information, a company can enhance its reputation but at the cost of foregoing the immediate gain that could be made by duping users; the company, therefore, takes short-term losses to build reputation and secure larger long-term gains. (Frost & Cooke, 1999).

### *2.3.1 Credibility and trust in the brand*

Credibility is the believability of an entity's intentions at a particular moment in time. That is, credibility is whether a company can be relied on to do what it says it will do. Credibility is time sensitive: the entity's perceived credibility today can differ

immensely from its perceived credibility by the same company on a previous or future date. Credibility is based on a company's intention. Credibility exists when one can confidently use past actions to predict future behaviour.

Once a reputation is established, the company has ample incentive to maintain that reputation. A company that fails to follow through loses its credibility; to regain credibility, it must again pay the high costs of reputation building. Credibility would be lacking if the company were to offer unverified statements. Loss of that credibility would mean fewer clients. (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)

Reputation building is related to the consistency of the outcomes. A website visit can be either positive or negative, for in either case repeated consistency increases both credibility and reputation. A company can have a horrible reputation but be totally credible.

Credibility is thus the believability of the current intention; reputation is a historical notion based on the sum of past behaviours. Both credibility and reputation are dynamic in nature; both are prone to change over time and are a function of time. Reputation and credibility are states; reputation building and credibility establishment are processes. The credibility of a company increases if its actions agree with its statements and its credibility decreases if its actions and pronouncements are inconsistent. (Jones, 1999)

### *2.3.2 The Influence of reputation on company brand*

A company with a good overall reputation owns a valuable asset - "goodwill": (brand names, corporate logos and customer loyalty). However, a reputation is fragile. It can be lost easily and once lost it takes much time and effort to restore. It takes from seven to ten times the effort to restore a reputation once lost. That is, the negative impact of a single mixed signal is seven to ten times stronger than the impact of a signal fulfilled. (Sunde & Brodie, 1993)

The more believable the message source, the more likely it will influence the



receptor. The better a company's reputation, the higher its chances are of getting a favourable first hearing for a new product and of getting early adoption of that product. The source effect influence varies by the character and competence of the receptor. A good reputation allows a company to get its "salesman's foot in the door" but has smaller effects in the final buying decision.

In order to become successful, brands must have developed a positive reputation. Customers tend to use brand names as signals of quality and value and often gravitate to products with brand names they have come to associate with quality and value. Brand names can often be repositories for a company's reputation: high-quality performance on one product can often be transferred to another product via the brand name. (Goodyear, 1993)

The primary purpose of brands and brand names is to provide for the user a symbolic meaning, which assists the user in the recognition and decision-making process. Brands often develop a "personality" of their own that has an effect on whether users decide the product's image is consistent with their needs. With this "personality" often goes a reputation as well. (Aaker, 1996)

In other words creating a reputation for its target group is possibly the most crucial and valuable exercise an educational institution can perform when it contemplates using the Internet to advertise its services to potential students. Using the web's interactive abilities, effective marketing is essentially about providing the right message at the right time to generate action.

## **2.4 Concept of the brand**

Defining the brand is usually called a brand audit. It involves gaining a deep understanding of the brand or potential brand, what it means to customers and prospects. Also how it relates to competitor brands and what role it plays in the marketplace. Getting this information is usually accomplished through talking to customers and prospects via focus groups.

Exercises are crafted to delve beneath the surface and get at the true feelings customers and prospects have about the brand and those of competitors. This is where brand attributes are identified - functional and emotional, as well as positive and negative. The brand's strengths and weaknesses are exposed, and customer affinity and loyalty are probed. A brand is an identifiable entity that makes specific promises of value. It is the sum of attributes associated with a product, service, or concept, including its name, visual presentation, its value proposition, and its reputation (Aaker, 1996).

The brand is one of the most comprehensive and valuable elements of any company or organization. Putting the idea into action is brand management. In order to effectively plan and implement a brand strategy management, the current state of the business must first be analysed to uncover the needs and issues that are unique to the industry and company. (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998, Dibb et al, 1994)

The word "brand", when used as a noun, can refer to a company name, a product name, or a unique identifier such as a logo or trademark. Brand associations reflect, "the unique meanings associated with a brand name" (Rangaswamy et al., 1993). In its simplest form, a brand is nothing more and nothing less than the promises of value the product makes.

These promises can be implied or explicitly stated, but none-the-less, value of some type is promised. On the other hand, high equity brands are those with a high level of brand recognition and recall, and have strong associations with a set of favourable beliefs in customers' memories (Keller, 1993). The following table 3 on the next page will describe some definitions in depth.



Brand definition	Brief explanation
Legal system	Mark of ownership as in trademark, name or logo
Logo	Recognised name, term, design, symbol
Company	Recognisable corporate name and image
Shorthand	Represents characteristics or values which are associated with the brand
Risk reducer	Brand as a contract with the customer
Identity system	Holistic, consistent, integrated vision
Image	Image in customers' mind is the brand reality
Value system	Brand values to match relevant customer values
Personality	Brands as symbolic devices with personalities that users value beyond their functional utility
Relationship	Extension of brand personality. Brand is an expression of the relationship between the customer and product
Added value	Added value differentiates brands. Added value represents the non-functional benefits that are offered in addition to functional benefits. Customers imbue brand with subjective meaning that they value sufficiently to buy
Evolving entity	Brand concept changes by stage of development

**Table 3 Brand definition and explanation** (De Chernatory & Riley, 1998)

Table 3 shows that the concept of brand may have multiple meanings. The construct is complex and customers may adjust their concept of brand for different product or service categories. Brand can be focused on things such as a logo, an element that is only a small part of a greater whole. Further, different customers may place different emphasis on the different interpretation of the brand concept even in the context of the same brand, as is consistent with the concept of evolving brand. (Goodyear, 1996)

Brand terminology in itself is troubling, Biel (1992) talks about brandscapes, Aaker (1997) about brand personality, Keller (1998) about brand image, and Berry (2000) about brand meaning, most of which have conceptual similarities and are often referred to synonymously within the literature. (Biel,1992, Aaker 1997 and Berry, 2000)

Brands enhance the perceived utility and desirability of a service. They have the ability to add to or subtract from the perceived value of a service. Brand equity translates into customer preference and loyalty. Brand equity has been pointed out to

include many dimensions, such as performance, social image, value, trustworthiness and identification. (Lassar, et.,1995)

#### *2.4.1 Brands and branding*

Branding today is used to create emotional attachment to products and companies. Branding efforts create a feeling of involvement, a sense of higher quality, and an aura of intangible qualities that surround the brand name, mark, or symbol. Much of the marketing theory on brand building is built on what is termed the cognitive information model, which is defined as diligent consideration of important information about the brand (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999)

Aaker's (1996) brand identity framework proposes four elements under which an identity is typically developed for a brand. These are:

- 1 brand as product,
- 2 brand as organization,
- 3 brand as person, and
- 4 brand as symbol.

Aaker defines the brand as mentioned above. Brand as **product** is about the product related attributes of the brand. This dimension deals with the tangible and the intangible aspects of the product and the manner in which the customer relates to it. Brand as **organization** deals with the organization's innovation, customer concern etc., which are important for building strong brands. Brand as **person** deals with the personality aspects of the brand. This tells us what happens to the brand when it is converted to a person by endowing it with social, demographic and psychographics' values. Finally brand as **symbol** deals with the symbolic aspects of the brand like visual imagery, logo, brand heritage etc. Any given brand can be described in terms of these four elements. This basic framework has been extended in this study to brand a service. (Aaker, 1996)



#### 2.4.2 Brand as symbol

Since intangibles are more pronounced in services, branding them involves careful handling of symbolic aspects. Several caveats have to be mentioned before looking at the items under this heading. There are several ways of branding a product or a service and the outline provided here is just one of the several possibilities.

The meaning of "symbol" is often discussed in branding literature: Kapferer (1992) opines that a brand is "a symbol, a word, an object and a concept - all at one and the same time". He also delves into the meaning of symbols. He states "... the flying red horse of Mobil, or the tree or the emblem of Bull... have been deliberately chosen to reflect their brand's personality and culture. Personality and certain other values are considered of primary importance among the guidelines governing a company's design and graphic identity programme".

Aaker and Joachimstahler (2000) give a more detailed description of what a symbol stands for. *"A symbol can provide cohesion and structure to an identity, making it easier to achieve recognition and recall"*. (Aaker & Joachimstahler, 2000)

#### 2.4.3 Brand awareness

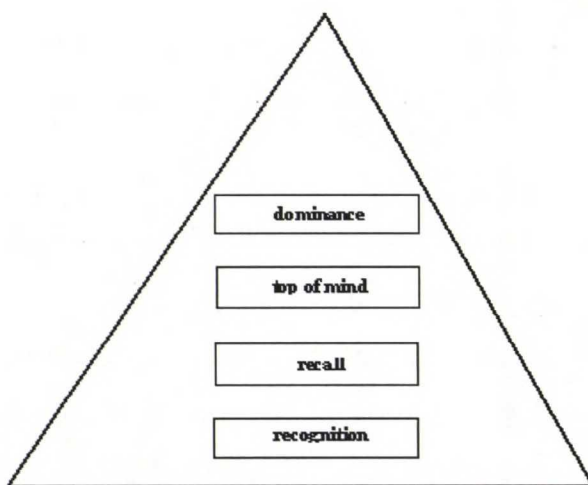
Brand awareness is the proportion of target customers that recall a brand. Brand awareness is a common measure of marketing communications' effectiveness. Unaided awareness is spontaneous; aided or prompted awareness is when the name is recognised among others that are listed or identified. Chen and Hitt define brand awareness as knowledge that the brand exists and the customers are actually considering it as one of the alternatives. (Chen & Hitt, 2001)

Keller (1998) refers to customer perceptions of brands as brand knowledge, consisting of brand awareness (recognition and recall) and brand image. He defines brand image as *"perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in customer memory"*. The brand awareness is conceptualized as a node in memory, which allows other information about the brand to be "anchored" to it.

Brand awareness is when people recognize the brand and attach it to a company. This does not necessarily mean they prefer the brand or the brand preference. It just means they recognize the brand and can identify it under different conditions. (Keller, 1998)

The act of creating public awareness of a specific brand in order to maximize its recognition, successful brand awareness strategies defines a company's uniqueness and sets it apart from competitors. Quite simply, if potential customers do not know about a company, they will not contact them. Therefore, one of the pre-eminent goals of any business is to build brand awareness, albeit in as cost-effective manner as possible. (Chen & Hitt, 2001)

Consumers tend to make decisions based on peer recommendations and direct experience, as well as traditional advertising methods. This is why it is necessary to build brand awareness strategies by instilling trust among consumers. This trust must be achieved through credibility, rather than just a catchy advertising campaign. Promotional marketing involving a one-to-one component is proving increasingly effective at building trust and acquiring new customers.



**Figure 2. Brand awareness pyramid diagram adapted (Aaker, 1996)**

The first, lowest stage of the brand awareness pyramid (see Figure 2) is the recognition stage when people are familiar with, and are linked somehow to, the brand. 'Recall' stands for the people who visit the website often. 'Top of mind' stands for a strong preference, and during this, stage people are adding the website to their



'favourite' links. The dominance stage is the most desired stage and shows great loyalty and can be seen as the sole source provider. (Aaker, 1996)

#### *2.4.4 Brand equity and brand association*

Brand equity has gained renewed attention in recent years. While many definitions of brand equity exist, one of the most widely accepted definitions, stated by Farquhar, is that brand equity is the "*added value endowed by the brand to the product*" (Farquhar 1989).

Brand equity is the total sum of all the different values people attach to the brand, or the holistic value of the brand to its owner as a corporate asset. Brand equity is important due to the quality-laden informational content that it provides when customers process information about a particular product. The importance of brand equity has led to many published studies that explore the importance of brand equity in marketing (Keller, 1993).

Associations include perceptions of brand quality and attitudes toward the brand. Similarly, Aaker (1996) proposes that brand associations are anything linked in memory to a brand. Keller and Aaker both appear to hypothesize that customer perceptions of brands are multi-dimensional, yet many of the dimensions they identify appear to be very similar.

The major assets of the brand can be grouped into five categories: brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and other proprietary brand assets such as patents, trademarks, and channel relationships (Aaker, 1991). From a customer-based perspective, Keller (1993) defined brand equity as the differential effects that brand knowledge has on customer response to the marketing of that brand.

According to Aaker, brand associations are the category of a brand's assets and liabilities that include anything "linked" in memory to a brand (Aaker, 1991). He defines brand associations as informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory that contains the meaning of the brand for customers. Brand associations

are important to marketers and to customers.

Brand association is, a network of nodes. It links the brand node memory with a variety of associations or simple unique association linked to it. Marketers use brand associations to differentiate, position, and extend brands, to create positive attitudes and feelings toward brands, and to suggest attributes or benefits of purchasing or using a specific brand. Customers use brand associations to help process, organize, and retrieve information in memory and to aid them in making purchase decisions (Aaker, 1991).

Biel (1992) argued that brand association (brand image) could result from corporate image, product image and user image. Each of these three images can be divided into two types of association. One is the perception of utilitarian and functional attributes, such as speed or ease of operation.

The other is related to soft or emotional attributes, such as providing fantasy or being exciting, innovative, or trustworthy. Farquhar (1989) suggests that the types of brand association include product category, usage situation, product attribute, and customer benefits. Keller (1993) asserted that brand associations could be classified into three major categories of increasing scope: attributes, benefits, and attitudes.

Attributes are those descriptive features that characterize a product or service, what a customer thinks the product or service is or has and what is involved with its purchase or consumption. Attributes can be categorized into product-related attributes, and non-product-related attributes such as price or brand personality.

Benefits are the personal values customers attach to product or service attributes - that is, what customers think the product or service can do for them. Brand identity is made up of these different types of brand associations, which can vary according to their flavour, strength, and uniqueness.

Attitude is an intangible concept. It is subjective by nature. Keller (1993) defines it as follows: *"Brand attitude is the most abstract and highest of brand association"*

Thus a successful brand attitude strategy requires a correct understanding of the



level of involvement in the customer decision-making procedure, and what motivates behaviour in the category.

Brand is more than just a word or symbol used to identify products and companies. A brand also stands for the immediate image, emotions, or perceptions people experience when they think of a company or product. A brand represents all the tangible and intangible qualities and aspects of a product or service. A brand represents a collection of feelings and perceptions about quality, image, lifestyle, and status. It is precisely because brands represent intangible qualities that the term is often hard to define. Intangible qualities, perceptions, and feelings are often hard to grasp and clearly describe (de Chernatony, 2003)

## **2.5 Brand building on the website**

A website invites users to be involved with the brand, learn about the services, sign up for services, be a key source of information on almost any topic, play an active role in the marketing experience, thus closely bonding with the brand. Brand building on the website primarily helps complement and retain the brand's properties in the physical world. To be successful, all brands must deliver on their promise, stand for something and have a consistent voice and message. Unhappy web visitors switch to competitors.

In every moment of truth with Internet browsers, either expectations are met, or not. Branding happens with every website visit, every view, and every click in the Internet. The challenge is in knowing what is happening to the brand due to which action. Many time also, the brand message to the Web browser is weak, confused, irrelevant, or, worst of all, indistinguishable from competitor offerings. Can an organized and structured brand management leverage of brand identity create a competitive advantage through the website?

Real world brand equity does not translate online automatically. The competitive Internet environment makes it vital for companies to differentiate themselves with brand and marketing strategies that exhibit clear messages and provide fulfilling user

experiences, managing the brand equity in the online environment by creating and promoting distinctive and expandable identities, thereby ensuring the longevity of the brand.

The most important assets of any business are intangible: its company name, brands, symbols, and slogans, and their underlying associations, perceived quality, name awareness, customer base, and proprietary resources such as patents, trademarks, and channel relationships. These assets, which comprise brand equity, are a primary source of competitive advantage and future reputation. Yet, research shows that managers cannot identify with confidence their brand associations, levels of customer awareness, or degree of customer loyalty. Moreover in the last decade, managers desperate for short-term financial results have often unwittingly damaged their brands through price promotions and unwise brand extensions, causing irreversible deterioration of the value of the brand name. (Aaker, 1999)

Using realistic, but fictional brand names, the study of Olson and Thjømøe (2003) has found that exposure does build preference for the name. Providing information in addition to the brand name, however, did not enhance preference for the brand if the information was not processed. To the extent that this preference rating might translate into purchase behaviour, these findings suggest that increasing exposure would be more beneficial to new brands than well-established brands.

The results of the study made by Ward and Lee (2000) indicates that as individuals gain more experience using the Internet, they are more likely to search for alternative sources of information and be less reliant on branding. They infer that this supports the notion that branding does not merely promote loyalty. The researchers also conjecture that as the Internet population matures, brand reliance will assure the quality and may give way to reliance on information, more easily found because of the decreasing costs of searching. These findings could have implications for the future of branding and the level of advertising on both the Internet and in general.

What does it take to become a successful power brand on the website? Is it a thorough understanding of branding, a discipline around branding, or a process to get

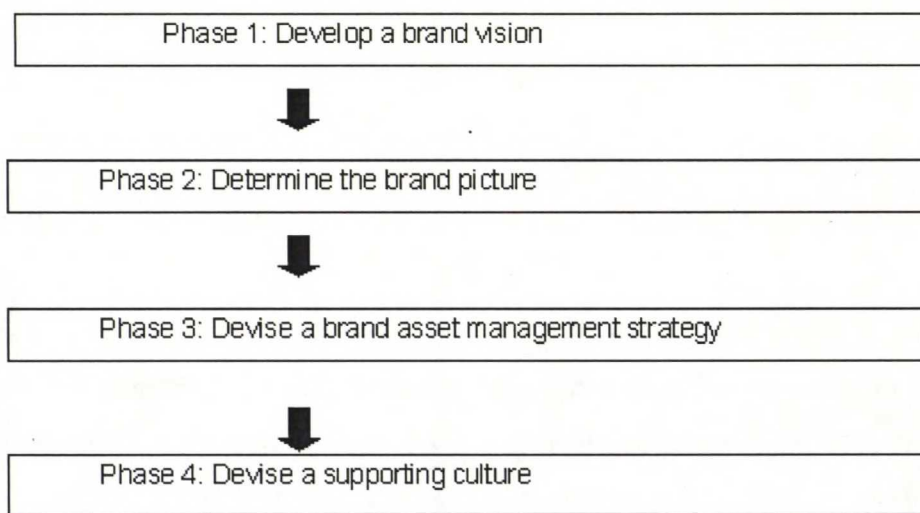


from point A to point B? Branding is partly art and partly science. As in the traditional brick and mortar branding making too many mistakes is crucial and to get another chance - the customers may not forgive, and the top management of the organization may not either, it is important to proceed with caution. There is no excuse for not branding; failure to build a brand can result in extinction.

Once the brand has been defined and described, it is time to determine where the ideal or optimal place for the brand really is. In order to do this effectively the brand must be viewed in relation to the overall business strategy and plan. All the fore-mentioned depends on what business the company is in. Who does the company want to attract as customers? What do those customers want? Where is the market opportunity? The brand is an important vehicle in achieving the overall business objectives. (Aaker, 2000)

Branding is all about perceptions. That is what branding and brand management are all about. Brand management recognizes that the market's perceptions may be different from what the company desires while it attempts to shape those perceptions and adjust the branding strategy to ensure that the market's perceptions are exactly what is intended.

A better understanding of what a brand is and why awareness about the brand is important does not necessarily mean that the brand enjoys high brand equity in the marketplace. Management may not even understand the real meaning of brand management - shaping and managing perceptions. Davies (2000) proposes a four base Brand Asset Management model (Figure 3). This is one of the few models that could be useful in the higher education sector as it adopts an external and internal orientation.



**Figure 3 Brand Asset Management Model** (Davies, 2000)

Davies' framework (figure 3) consists of four step-by-step procedures to develop and leverage the brand's strength and to maximise its asset value. The first stage is to develop the brand vision. It is essential to define the elements of a brand vision. The brand must be linked to the corporate vision and must fill a financial gap. Senior management should share the created vision.

Secondly the brand image should be defined. During this stage the company will learn to view the brand as the consumer views it, and will discover what the brand stands for, why customers choose this particular brand over others, and what additional needs and wants the brand could fulfil. The company will also see what the brand promises customers and how to deliver these promises. This stage can be also called crafting a brand-based customer model.

The third stage includes the initial development of brand asset management strategy. Once the two previous stages are done, the company will learn how to create a brand asset management strategy. The company will learn how to position their brand, how to expand into new areas, and how to keep the brand fresh and new.

The final stage is to find the supporting brand asset management culture. The purpose of this stage is to determine how to get the company to rally around the brand as an asset and make sure the strategies recommended are implemented and measured. Brands are among the companies' most valuable assets. At their best they will be competitive and efficient. With proper brand management the companies will achieve the required objectives. (Davies, 2000)



## **2.6 The benefits of a strong brand**

A strong brand influences customer decision and shapes the ownership experience. Branding creates trust and an emotional attachment to the product or company. This attachment then causes the market to make decisions based, at least in part, upon emotion-- not necessarily just for logical or intellectual reasons.

Branding helps decision-making to become easier. This way, branding delivers a very important benefit. A strong brand will help the customers trust and create a set of expectations about the services. They don't necessarily need to know the specifics of service features. (Collins & Porras, 1994)

A strong brand can make actual product features virtually insignificant. A solid branding strategy communicates a strong, consistent message about the value of the company. A strong brand helps to sell value and the intangibles that surround the services.

A strong brand signals that the company wants to build customer loyalty, not just inform about possibilities. A strong branding campaign will also signal that the company is serious about marketing and that it has the intention of being around for a while. A brand impresses the company's identity upon potential customers, not necessarily to capture an immediate sale but rather to build a lasting impression of the company and its products. Branding builds name recognition for the company or product. (Keller & Aaker, 1997)

### **3. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT ON THE WEB**

Branding has been one of the hottest business topics over the past few years. Add to that the Internet's explosive growth, and companies begin to identify new business challenges arising out of the intersection of these two forces. There are many new opportunities to consider: from start-ups to pure dot-com plays, to B2C and B2B, to bricks and clicks. Determining the right role and strategy for the company's Internet brand requires careful consideration.

Organizations of all types are recognizing the value and importance of using their brands to improve performance and build deep relationships with their customers. The reason for this rush to branding is straightforward. With the proliferation of competitors and products and services that are easily duplicated or replaceable, brands become an important means of simplifying the decision-making process for buyers. If managed properly, brands create difference, relevance, and affinity.

#### **3.1 Website brands**

Are brands on-line different to brands off-line? Is there a different way the brand's promise is executed on-line? Or is a brand a brand, regardless of its environment?

More organizations now recognize that the website is not a passive medium, acting as an information provider. Rather it is a dynamic environment that gives involvement in the brand experience by the interactive way of building trust and value in the brand. When migrating a brand to the website, the organization needs to recognize that any promised experience hinges on viewers' knowledge of the brand's history.

This argument suggests that because people can examine and access any product or service from every possible provider via the website, the brand would be irrelevant - customers would always choose the one with the highest interest. A study made by Leslie de Chernatony (2003) suggests that brands are even more important in cyberspace than they are in most other channels or environments.

Again, the reason is simple. With more and more choices from many providers that



are relatively unknown, customers tend to choose a provider they know - one that represents a set of values or attributes that are meaningful, clear and trusted (a brand), especially if they cannot see or confirm that the provider is "real". (de Chernatony, 2003)

### **3.2 Creating the website brand strategy**

The creation of the brand strategy should involve the whole organization from the top to the bottom. Realizing the brand vision requires identifying the people, resources, and approaches necessary to achieve the vision. Other considerations include choosing the appropriate brand strategy framework. Three basic frameworks are available, ranging from the **conglomerate brand** to the **corporate brand** to the **master brand** or **umbrella brand models**.

A corporate brand strategy involves a closer relationship between the company and its brands. A master brand strategy demonstrates the closest relationship between a company and its brands.

Once the website brand positioning and brand strategy have been determined, the next step involves identifying the specific brand actions that can be taken in each functional area of the business where the brand is encountered. These brand actions represent opportunities for the brand to be reinforced and to ensure that the brand's attributes are being delivered and communicated effectively - every time the brand is encountered. This is where the brand becomes everyone's business.

To move the brand to its optimal position requires a plan acknowledging that everything must work together and that some actions must occur before others. This part of the branding process is the most overlooked.

Most companies typically assume that, once they have identified what needs to be done, it will happen. Instead, the companies must begin the process of operations, the brand that is, identifying and formalizing the types of behaviors that must be exhibited by everyone in the organization, especially those actually delivering the brand to the market. (De Chernatony, 2003)

This means building performance and measurement systems that reward or promote specific brand behaviors. Over time, the behaviors become part of how people, and hence the brand, act consistently. The organization develops a brand culture that becomes its style - everyone is a part of it and can take pride in what the brand represents and accomplishes. A side benefit of this level of brand permeation is that the brand starts to attract the right kind of employees - those who find the brand as attractive a place to work as customers find it attractive to do business with.

The Internet has unique sensory aspects that provide for strong emotional and affinity connections, for instance motion, entertainment, interaction, and self-direction. Searching the ways that emphasize what the companies are trying to accomplish with the brand on the Internet; exploiting the website's unique characteristics to create and strengthen brand affinity - loyalty that builds the brand experience.

The final step in the process of developing a successful power brand recognizes that brands are dynamic - they must be monitored and measured to ensure that they remain relevant to the customer. In addition, it is wise to establish a baseline benchmark of specific brand metrics such as awareness, attribute association, preference, and loyalty, so that, as the brand actions are implemented, the return on investment for each action can be measured and rewarded. As with most things, it is important to track progress, so that efforts and expenses for future branding actions can be justified.

Clearly, the Internet represents both opportunity and challenge for existing brands as well as start-ups. Experience confirms that the ease of establishing a brand and the significance of branding in cyberspace are more difficult and more important than many initially suggested. Nonetheless, the reasons for building a brand and the



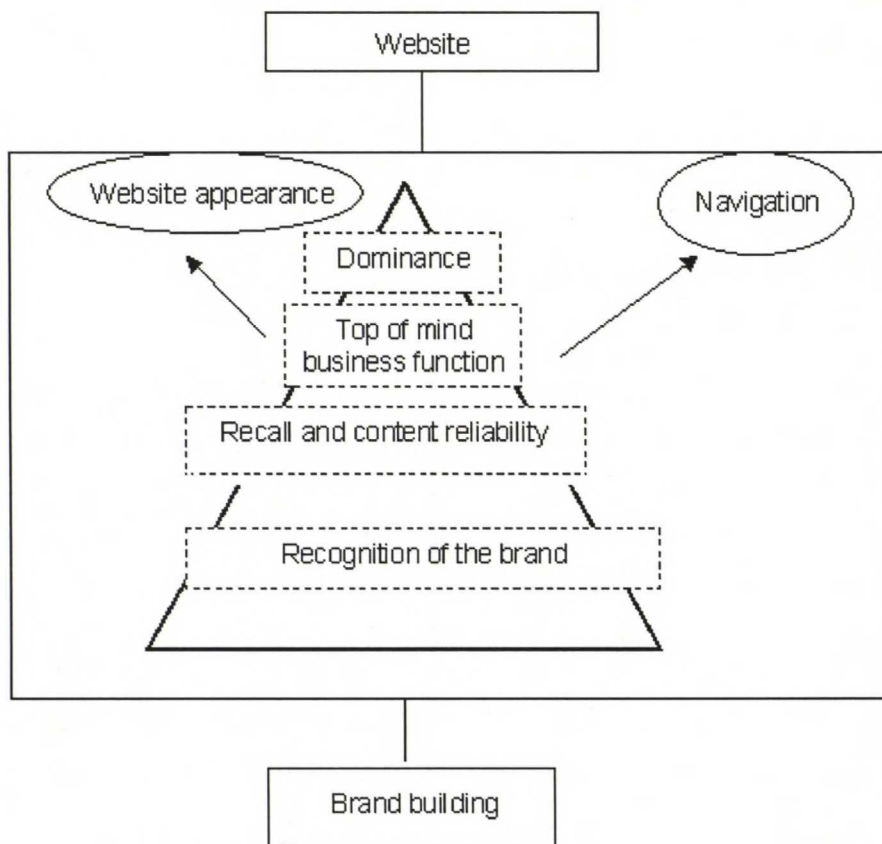
process and discipline in managing one are based on sound principles that have been proven over time. (Bergstrom, 2000)

Despite the obvious advantage, many companies are likely to make some common mistakes in relation to their brands in the Internet. They may wrongly assume that their brands will have the same appeal to Internet users as to traditional channel users. Although the demographic composition may appear similar, Internet users do have significant attitudinal differences. They will also incorrectly assume that the Internet is just another channel of distribution for their product and/or service. The Internet is more than just another channel - for many business propositions, it is a new category with a much broader reach and the ability to market one-to-one. Therefore, the Internet must be viewed in the proper context and against strategic goals and objectives, and used effectively to strengthen the brand to the extent that it results in additional customers, higher customer loyalty, higher revenues and market share, and, ultimately, profits.(Pringle et al., 2001)

Developing brands on the website should not be based on a "follow the leader" prescription, but rather should consider how customers' increased involvement can be harnessed to co-produce more value. Customers learn about brands through electronic conversations with other customers and brand owners need to listen and respond to these conversations. (Neuborne & Hof, 1998) By then developing customer-focused enhancements, brands are protected from the vicious downward price spiral associated with great transparency. Adopting a more relaxed view about controlling a brand may take some organisations time to accept – but with the speed of change through the Internet it is important to prepare for new ways of executing the brand's essence. (Hankinson, & Cowking, 1992)

### **3.3 Success factors of the website**

It is a fact that well-designed websites have critical success factors. When a customer accesses a company's website, the appearance, structure, and maintenance status all influence the customer's perception of both the transaction experience and corporate image.



**Figure 4: Website success factors adapted** (de Chernatony, 2003)

The figure 4 illustrates the website success factors.. Even though a standard for website evaluation criteria does not exist, the main stream of selected evaluation criteria relates to user satisfaction. Therefore, considering user satisfaction, the following six criteria, according to de Chernatony (2003), can be used to for evaluating the website by integrating the criteria used so far:

Website can contain interesting features such as games and events, and if it is visually well designed, visitors may feel pleasure whenever they drop by that site and may not hesitate to visit it again. For this reason **website attractiveness** is treated as an important criterion.

**Top of the mind business function** refers to the questions related to the service information, which should be contained in a website. This can be called also the data



centre of the website. Clear information related to a corporation will increase users' assessment of the reliability of the website.

**Recall and content reliability** measures the reliability of the information a website displays. This reliability can be enhanced if a website has contact information and related references that customers can verify.

**Website appearance** should be clear so users can ascertain the components of the site. Also it should be easy and fast to access the website itself and the necessary information. To guarantee these website characteristics, the sites should be constructed systematically.

**Navigation** is the essence of the website because moving around using links is what the website is all about (Nielsen, 2001). Without **efficient navigation**, users are easily confused, lost, and unintentionally leave the site. If users once leave the site, they may not come back again. Each industry has its own characteristics. While some criteria such as navigation seem applicable to all industries, others, such as credibility are more applicable to some industries than to others.

For established firms, a well designed website helps reinforce the firm's **brand recognition** while a poorly designed website is doing just the opposite. For new firms, whether dot-coms or local/regional traditional firms going nationally or globally online, a well designed website can help start the process of building brand recognition. A poorly designed website may not engage the customer, causing them to move to another website without evaluating the website's content.

A firm's brand association comes from its brand-building actions. David Aaker, the leading thinker on branding, notes that a firm's brand is more than a simple identifier for customers. Brands provide critical evaluative information relating to the product and the organization, conveying product attributes such as quality as well as credibility and believability. (Aaker, 2000)

### **3.4 The trust of the website**

The intangibles play a greater role in experience and credence in educational services; the trust of advertising online is indirect. The information alone will not serve the purpose of building trust when searching for a future place to study. Word-of-mouth communication becomes important (Ekelund et al., 1995). Especially among young people, the example of others and the way others are acting is essential (Quart, 2003)

The issue of presenting information on the website is secondary information, claims Teemu Ylikoski (2003) in his Doctoral Dissertation. The customer must first find and land on the site. Still today the common ways through which customers find sites are through hyperlink paths, or with search engine queries. According to Ylikoski the most important objective for the company is to make sure the most obvious paths (i.e. other sites) link to the website.

Both the domain name and brand need to be memorable to the customers. The use of established brand names in a domain name significantly increases the chances of a customer being able to use existing brand knowledge to locate a website. Companies need to acquire the domain names that might be associated with any established brand names, either with the intention of using them or to prevent their use by other people.

On the other hand, simpler domain names are more memorable and their integrated promotion is likely to have a more lasting impact. This is particularly important because viewers do not sit watching television or drive past a billboard advertisement with a pencil in their hand or a keyboard at their fingertips. Early use of URLs in advertisements for bricks-and-mortar companies did little more than announce the URL: Now that websites often have more to offer customers, and are a more central component of company's strategy, advertisements are more proactive in seeking to attract customers through special offers, intriguing information and other draws. (McManus, 2001)



## **4. POLYTECHNICS IN FINLAND**

The early 1990s saw the launch of the development of a vocational higher education sector in the Finnish education system. The goals included raising the level of education and upgrading vocational post-secondary education into higher education degrees. In 1992, the first 22 temporary polytechnics (in Finnish ammattikorkeakoulu) were established by combining 85 educational institutions, which had previously provided vocational post-secondary education, and by upgrading their education to meet the standards of higher education.

By virtue of legislation issued in 1995, the system was made permanent and the Government granted a permanent operating license to the first nine polytechnics. Since then, permanent operating licenses have been granted each year. Since August 2000, all polytechnics have operated on a permanent basis.

Polytechnics usually offer teaching in a number of different fields. Polytechnic students complete higher education degrees with a professional emphasis: the starting points for the development of these degrees include the requirements and needs of working life and the degrees qualify the graduate for various expert functions in working life. The minimum and maximum scopes of polytechnic degrees are mainly three and four years respectively.

There are 31 polytechnics in the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education. In addition to education leading to polytechnic degrees, polytechnics organize adult education. They can also carry out research and development work that serves polytechnic education and supports working life.

### **4.1 Haaga Institute Polytechnic**

Haaga Institute Polytechnic is a privately owned school maintained by the industry. The polytechnic includes four separate units: three in Helsinki and one in Vierumäki. Haaga Institute (HI) arranges training in hospitality and tourism management, Helsinki School of Business and Malmi School of Business organize training in business and administration and Finland's Sports Institute specializes in sports and

leisure studies.

The following communities and corporations are the members of the Haaga foundation:

- Helsinki Business College Ltd
- Finland's Restaurant Employees' Union
- Malmi Business School Ltd
- Restel Ltd
- Scandic Hotels Ltd
- Finnish Hotel and Restaurant Association
- Finnish Hotel Association
- Finnish Travel Association
- SOK Co-op and
- the Friends of the Finnish Sports Institute.

Haaga Institute Polytechnic started its operations as a temporary polytechnic in 1991. Studies for the polytechnic degree (Restonomi, AMK) were carried out as a hotel, restaurant and tourism management course in Finnish. A corresponding degree programme in English (Degree Programme in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management) started in 1993. Haaga Institute Polytechnic received its permanent polytechnic status in 1996.

This study concentrates solely on Haaga Institute (HI), the unit that arranges three managerial-level degree programmes: Degree Programme in Hotel and Restaurant Management, Degree Programme in Tourism Management (both conducted in Finnish), and Degree Programme in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management (conducted in English). These degree programmes comprise 210 ECTS-credit units and the length of studies is 3,5 years.

The key study areas in Haaga Institute are hospitality industry professional studies: food and beverage management, accommodation management, tourism studies; business studies: accounting, law, marketing and human resources management;



and languages, computing skills and other communication studies. In addition, the students complete 20 weeks of practical training.

## **4.2 Selection criteria for Finnish polytechnics**

The general requirement for admission to polytechnics is general or vocational upper secondary education and training. In other words, applicants eligible for polytechnic studies include those who have completed the matriculation examination (in Finnish ylioppilastutkinto), general upper secondary school or an upper secondary vocational qualification, or those with a corresponding international or foreign qualification.

Applicants fulfilling the eligibility criteria have the right to apply to any polytechnic. They can apply to polytechnics through the national joint application system. Using this system, applicants may fill in a single application form to apply for a maximum of four degree programmes involved in the joint application system anywhere in Finland. Polytechnics decide their student selection criteria independently. The criteria include previous study record (average grade and grades emphasised in the relevant field) and work experience. In addition, an entrance or aptitude test is often applied.

Starting from the student selection for the academic year 1999–2000, applicants may only accept one study place leading to a higher education degree in each academic year. A study place leading to a higher education degree means a place in a programme leading to a lower or higher academic degree (Bachelor's or Master's degree) at a university, or to a polytechnic degree.

### ***4.2.1 Intake of students to Haaga Institute***

Each year 180 students are admitted to the different degree programmes in Haaga Institute; of which 60 are students in the Tourism management degree programme, 100 in the Hotel and Restaurant Management Degree Programme and 20 in the Degree Programme in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management. From the latter group approximately 10 students have completed previous education abroad and 10

students in Finland. Most applicants are from the Metropolitan area of Helsinki.

Degree Programme	Yearly Intake	Applicants 2003	2003 intake %	Applicants 2004	2004 intake %
Hotel and Restaurant Management (in Finnish)	100	472	21	598	17
Tourism Management (in Finnish)	60	433	14	427	14
Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management (In English)	20	134	15	238	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>1039</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1263</b>	<b>14</b>

**Table 4 Applicants to Haaga Institute 2003 - 2004** (Haaga Institute Polytechnic, 2004)

Students are selected through a joint selection programme for the Finnish degree programmes and a direct application selection for the English degree programme. There is a mandatory entrance examination and an interview conducted by an industry representative and a staff member, for both intakes, joint or direct application selection. In the above-mentioned statistics (table 4) only first choice applicants have been taken into consideration.

#### *4.2.2 Development of the number of applicants to Haaga Institute*

Compared to the previous year, 2003, the respective applicant numbers were somewhat different for Haaga Institute. The Finnish degree programmes hotel and restaurant management received 472 applications. The increase was 126 applicants over the previous year. The intake percentage shows that it was harder to win a study place in the year 2004. The intake percentage dropped to 17 percent from the previous year's 21%. The tourism management degree programme lost a few applicants, from 433 in 2003 to 427 in year 2004. Thus the intake percentage remained the same at 14 percent.

The biggest increase occurred in the English-speaking degree programme where the number of applicants increased from 134 to 238 applicants this year, 2004. This increase of 104 can be explained by marketing efforts conducted in the Asian



countries. Also, the number of visitors to the Haaga Institute website increased. Several applicants are reapplying. There are some applicants that have applied for the fifth time and finally received a study place in the English-speaking programme.

Altogether in year 2003 Haaga Institute had 944 students registered, of which 623 studied in the Finnish-speaking Hotel and Restaurant Management degree programme and 321 in both English-speaking and Tourism Management degree programmes. The average graduation time from Haaga Institute is 3, 9 years. This falls within the average graduation time of the tourism, catering and institutional management study sector (see Table 3). (Häkkinen, 2004)

#### 4.2.3 Number of students at Haaga Institute

The Ministry of Education requires all polytechnics and universities to maintain statistics of the students per status. The status is classified among the polytechnics as follows: less than 3,5 years, 3,5 years and one year extra, on overtime (past 4,5 years) and registered as absent. Students need to apply for an extension to their studies after 4, 5 years of study.

Extension applications are submitted to the principal. The student applying for an extension should have the possibility of graduating within the next one year. He or she should have at least 100 study credits in the credit records.

Degree Programme	< 3,5 years	%	3,5 + 1 years	%	Overtime	%	Absent	%	Total number of students (Studying & absent)
Hotel and Restaurant Mgmt (in Finnish)	354	81,2	39	11	15	4	28	17	436
Tourism Mgmt (in Finnish)	225	85,6	16	7	9	4	13	14	263
Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Mgmt (In English)	79	77,4	12	15	4	5	7	8	102
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>82.1</b>	<b>67</b>		<b>28</b>		<b>48</b>		<b>801</b>

**Table 5 Students per status of in Haaga Institute 2004** (Haaga Institute Polytechnic, 2004)

The table 5 illustrates the number of students at Haaga Institute Polytechnic and the Haaga Institute unit. Only full-time students are included in the calculation. The Ministry of education funds those studying for 3, 5 plus one year. Students on “overtime” do not receive the funding of 5 539 euro/student.

#### 4.2.4 Number of graduates from Haaga Institute in 2004

The Degree Programme Directors annually build a budget based on the information received from the Ministry of Education. In May of each year, the Ministry of Education guarantees the amount for the intake for each degree programme. At the same time it issues the amount of funding the polytechnic is to receive per student. So far, the number of graduates has not been linked to the funding, but as time goes by this might change (Moilanen, 2004)

The graduation ceremony takes places all other months other than the month of July, which is recognized as a holiday month. In order to graduate, students must have all necessary 140 study credits registered prior to that date of graduation.

Degree Programme	Intake	Spring 2004	%	Fall 2004 cumulative	%	Budgeted 2004	%
Hotel and Restaurant Management (in Finnish)	100	56	56	70 (*)	70	80	80
Tourism Management (in Finnish)	60	35	58	42 (*)	70	48	80
Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management (In English)	20	9	45	14 (*)	70	18	80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>126(*)</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>80</b>

**Table 6 Graduates from Haaga Institute 2004 (\*) estimated** (Haaga Institute Polytechnic, 2004)

The table 6 demonstrates the number of graduates from Haaga Institute unit in the year 2004. The degree programme directors, including the author of this study, are facing a challenge as the cumulative number of graduates grows compared to the number in Spring 2004 as has happened.



This can be explained by students having a tendency to graduate in the spring. This habit is familiar from high school. (Häkkinen, 2004)

This information is important as the Ministry of Education looks at the intake and does not allow for "over-intake", even if several students are not graduating in the norm time of 3, 5 years. In table 7 the number of overtime students is shown to be just about the number of graduates needed for the budgeted number.

#### **4.3 Image of Haaga Institute**

Haaga Institute has an influential role both locally and nationwide through its training in the hotel, restaurant and tourism management. HI has been active in international contacts applicable to the study programmes of the institute and pursues education and research for the development of the hospitality industry.

Like all polytechnics in Finland Haaga Institute is also controlled and financed by the Ministry of Education. The annual funding in 2004 for Haaga Institute unit was 5 595, 72 euros per student. With that amount the polytechnic is required to offer high quality education to its students and to recruit potential students. The annual marketing fees directed to student recruitment and image building are 2.8 % of the annual budget. (Moilanen, 2004)

Haaga Institute provides education and training for undergraduates in the management course for supervisory and managerial positions in the hotel, restaurant and travel industry. Graduates receive the degree of Bachelor of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management and are also entitled to the title "restonomi amk".

A higher education institution's actual quality is often less important than its prestige, or reputation for quality, because it is the polytechnic's perceived excellence which, in fact, guides the decisions of prospective students and scholars considering offers of employment, and federal agencies awarding grants.

The image portrayed by polytechnics may be stable across the institution's

disciplines or may vary considerably, because each public may associate a number of features that publics use to distinguish amongst them. (For example an engineering polytechnic might have quite a different image to the business polytechnic or nursing school.) These images are formed from word of mouth, past experience and the marketing activities of the institution.

The image of the higher education institutions is not clear to the potential students, as they are unable to differentiate between the Bachelor degree of a polytechnic and that of a university. The bilateral model exists in Finland of the Bachelor Degree in polytechnics and universities. Bachelor's programmes are offered in traditional research universities and equivalent higher education institutions as well as at polytechnics. A Bachelor's level qualification can be achieved in three and a half or four and a half years, while a Master's level qualification can be achieved only at research universities after the Bachelor's level; usually after three additional years. There is a plan that in 2005, the Master's level will be also available in polytechnics in Finland. (Moilanen, 2004)

Polytechnics in Finland need to maintain or develop a distinct image to create a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market. The image in customer's mind is the brand reality. Image is an important factor when defining the brand (see table 3 page 22)

It is, after all, this image that will impact on a potential student's willingness to apply to a particular higher education institution for enrolment, or a company selecting an institution to do contracted research and development. At the same time both universities and polytechnics all over Finland are facing declining student numbers. For this reason, it becomes imperative for all higher education institutions to establish their images in the eyes of their various publics.

All Finnish higher education institutions are constantly looking for less expensive marketing tools than the more traditional printed media advertising, as the total funding from the Ministry of Education is most likely not going to increase in the immediate future. Polytechnics need to find more effective ways of reaching potential



students from the reducing age group (see Table 1 on page 12). This underlines the importance of the website as an inexpensive media for brand and image building. In this competitive environment; the marketers of polytechnics should be concerned about their higher education institution's positioning, image and brand. Potential students will in future look for more than just a place to study; they are becoming more conscious of the image and the brand. (Moilanen, 2004)

## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study a qualitative research approach was used. More specifically, it was conducted as a case study utilizing focus group interviews. The empirical part is a single-case study research. The case study research methodology is considered the most appropriate when only a little is known about the study phenomenon, or when the findings in some other studies made need a new and fresh perspective. Yin (2003) defines case study methods as a suitable research tool when the form of research question can be answered by how and why. Case studies have to focus on contemporary events. He also points out that no control of behavioural events is required. This study fulfils all the above-mentioned criteria, and it is therefore justified to select this particular method for this research. (Yin, 2003)

Data in qualitative research is usually gathered using less structured research instruments than in quantitative research. The findings are more in-depth since they make greater use of open-ended questions. The results provide much more detail on behaviour, attitudes and motivation

Qualitative research is more intensive and more flexible, allowing the researcher to probe since it has greater latitude to do so. The results are based on smaller sample sizes and are often not representative of the population, the research can usually not be replicated or repeated, giving it low reliability; and the analysis of the results is much more subjective. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

In general a qualitative research is exploratory in nature and uses procedures such as in-depth interviews and focus group interviews to gain insights and to develop creative tactics. In this study the focus group interview was chosen. The interviews were conducted by utilizing the GroupSystems® tool at Helsinki School of Economics.



## **5.1 Focus group method**

A focus group study is a structured series of group discussions designed to reveal perceptions and opinions on a defined issue involving carefully chosen participants who share common characteristics. The "data" from a typical focus group study are verbal comments made by participants in response to the moderator's questions and from other participants' comments as well as the moderator's or other observer's field notes regarding informative non-verbal behaviour in the group (e.g., behaviour that indicates the extent of agreement, emphasis, boredom, and so forth, group members exhibit in regard to a topic or question). (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The advantages of focus groups are that respondents experience a sense of safety in numbers and therefore greater willingness to express insight and greater spontaneity. Secondly, the process highlights the possible range of different attitudes and behaviours in a relatively short time. Thirdly, the group can be observed with the aim of yielding data on reactions, vocabulary and perceptions. Last but not least, group discussion triggers counter responses, which might not surface in individual discussion. (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1998)

The ideal group comprises between 8 and 10 people, although some researchers use anything from 6 to 12 people. Empirical research has shown that a group of 8 people generates more statistically important ideas than a group of 4, but not twice as many. If there are only a few people (i.e. 4) in the group, we cannot expect a group with all the interpersonal relationships and dynamics. It will be much more similar to 4 individual interviews. However, if there are more than 10 people, the focus group will be hard to guide without computer support, because some people will withdraw from the discussion and not say much. (Fern, 2001)

A focus group interview can be defined as a small group of people brought to a central location for an intensive discussion with a moderator who focuses discussion on various issues in accordance with a general outline of question areas.

The purposes are threefold: first to probe intensively for qualitative data related to specific problem areas; secondly to generate new ideas as a pre-testing device prior to a quantitative survey research study; or thirdly to have respondents experience and react to stimulus such as product, a television programme, a magazine, a commercial, or an idea that you want to test before proposing it. (Goebert & Rosenthal, 2001)

The focus group interview can be a valuable tool for collecting qualitative information in many different areas: marketing, advertising, politics, management, publishing, and communication research. The method can be used in large, analytic research studies or it can be used rather informally just to generate ideas or reactions. A manager can use it with a group of employees simply to see how they react to, or interpret, a message, a report, or a new system. A communication researcher or a management consultant can also use it extensively. Focus group interviews have certain limitations but that they are an excellent means of securing subjective information that has rich explanatory value

The main characteristics of the focus group are, according to Krueger and Casey (2000):

- Cooperation in the group can be emotionally provocative, which is not the case with the individual interview.
- Discussion often 'provokes' greater spontaneity and honesty than could be expected with individual interviews.
- Interaction between the participants of the focus group stimulates the development of new ideas.
- Reactions and responses in the group offer a possibility of observing a group process.
- The group offers ideas, dynamics of attitudes and opinions.

## **5.2 Moderator in focus group study**

A moderator in a focus group study is responsible for guiding the participants through a guideline. He/she looks after the group dynamics and that all participants join the discussion. Skills from similar areas are required. There generally aren't any rules



about the gender of the moderator, which is important only with specific issues at the time. (Greenbaum, 2002)

### **5.3 Group Support System GroupSystems®**

This study was conducted with the aid of GroupSystems®, a collaboratory software. Usually the term "collaboratory" has most often been used to describe a room containing computer workstations with special software designed to assist group decision-making processes such as brainstorming and consensus building. In other words this particular software integrates work on a single project by several users at separate computer workstations. (Aannestad, 1997)

The goal of any Group Support System (GSS) such as GroupSystems® is to help focus groups with communication, collaboration and coordination. Bidgoli (1996) defined GSS as follows: *"A software system that supports a group of decision makers engaged in a common decision making task by providing the same shared environment and information"*. (Bidgoli, 1996)

With GroupSystems® software, the participants anonymously input ideas, for example into a single shared document, where each person can constantly see what others are writing. Even the shy members of the group can avoid withholding good ideas. In the discussion during the GroupSystems® session everyone can share ideas and is not conflicted by the "groupthink" or some dominant members of the focus group interview. All ideas are as important and judged only upon their merits, rather than by who advocates them. In a normal classroom situation this would not be possible to achieve. (GroupSystems® website)

This software programme has several advantages as participants' ideas can be selected via anonymous voting, or the pros and cons of each idea can be quickly compiled, and even the highest-rated course of action can be identified. For research purposes, at the conclusion of a meeting the results are easily produced in a complete and accurate report of all ideas, comments, and vote results, in Word or .rtf format. This makes the task of the researcher easier as he/she does not need to

tape-record or to take notes by hand.

5.4 Research framework

In Finland higher education is free of charge for all students. The Ministry of Education controls and guides both polytechnics and universities. It evaluates the quality standards in education. The funding given to the polytechnics is undergoing a process of change. In future, the amount contributed per student will also be based on the number of graduates. For this reason, it is essential to recruit the best and most motivated students, so that they will graduate in norm-time. In polytechnics this should be 3.5 – 3.8 years.

Education in polytechnics should remain interesting for forthcoming youth groups. Even more important is that they will be employed in the future in jobs they aimed for prior to their education. The gap between the expected and the obtained should be minimal.

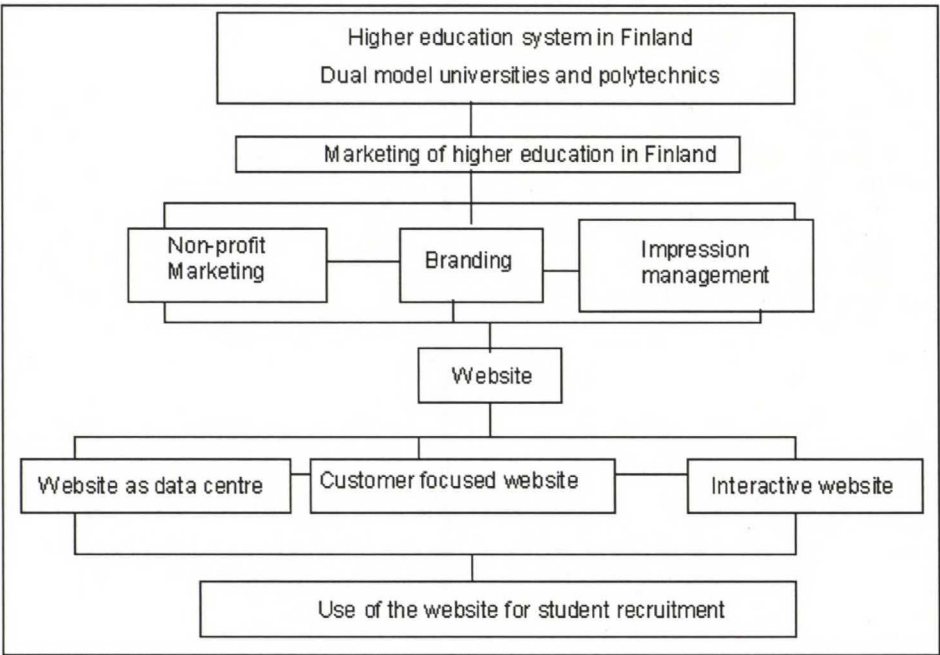


Figure 5 Framework of the study



The model (Figure 5) is a summary of the different parts of the framework applied in this study. These parts guide and explain the empirical research problems. The framework includes background information on higher education marketing. Marketing of higher education is traditionally non-profit marketing and funding is scarce and that is why website marketing is a suitable alternative.

All higher education institutes need to build a brand as only a high quality education will satisfy the needs of the potential students to be recruited. Young people are now used to brands everywhere so why would they ignore them while choosing the right education and the place for their education in the future? A brand is a brand regardless of its environment.

Impression management is essential for all kinds of companies. The website is no different. The website should be customer focused. Marketing efforts should be conducted in such a way that the brand's promise is fulfilled.

Designing a website is not an easy task. The website has different features. Higher education should choose very carefully the website strategy; it can be informative, customer-focused or interactive - and why not all three?

The website is a very suitable tool for recruiting new students. They require information on their potential study place. They want to make the right decision.

## 6. EMPIRICAL STUDY

The two focus group meetings for this study, one for Haaga Institute and one for Culinary School Perho students, were conducted at the Helsinki School of Economics with the guidance of Dr. Johanna Bragge. She acted as moderator and the author acted as motivator. The Haaga Institute (HI) and Culinary School Perho (Perho) students were chosen because they were perceived as matching the age group required by the study. Being an educational institution of secondary level, Perho Culinary School very often functions as a source of potential students for Haaga Institute.

Students from Haaga Institute were invited to the Helsinki School of Economics on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2004 and the students from Perho Culinary School on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 2004 (agenda appendix 4). Both sessions began with a welcome to the participants and a description of the study in question. The aim of the focus group meeting was introduced to Haaga Institute and Perho Culinary School students. Dr. Bragge opened the software and explained to the participants the usage of GroupSystems®.

The questions were grouped into three types: background questions of the participants, focus group questions and finally feedback questions.

The questions differed somewhat between the groups; mainly the phrasing of the questions was divergent due to their different backgrounds.

The author concentrates only on the impression and branding of the Haaga Institute Polytechnic's website of the Haaga Institute unit. The interest is solely in degree programmes in hotel, restaurant and tourism management for full-time youth students. The usability, design, navigation or special effects will be a subject for a further study.



## **6.1 Conducting focus group meeting**

Two primary goals of the focus group interviews were: to reveal the important themes and the degree of emphasis that underlies participants' comments with regard to the study questions, and to compare these themes with the two different types of groups.

In this study the focus group study on potential students' perceptions of brand and impression management sought to reveal the themes or categories of comments regarding ideas that may help Haaga Institute to better provide the information on their website. It was hoped that analysis of focus group data would reveal such themes as information seeking from the website, integrated marketing communication, brand awareness, logo, and so forth.

## **6.2. Data collection and data analysis**

Analysis of data in this research involves summarising the data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features. This qualitative research gave answers to help discover the big picture. A good starting point was to look at the themes and categories, which have emerged, and to use these to structure the results section of the research report. Qualitative researchers are interested in answering 'why'.

The credibility criteria involved establishing that the results of research were credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Since, from this perspective, the purpose of this qualitative research was to describe or understand the phenomena of interest in the participant's eyes, the participants were the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. (Fern, 2001)

The data was coded by themes. The essential goal was to develop a limited set of codes corresponding to themes that cut across chosen questions during the focus group interviews. Creating a general spreadsheet approach and coding for each chosen theme for analyzing focus group data accommodated these strategies. The themes were selected based on the focus group questions.

### **6.3 Focus group sample**

Both focus groups were invited to the research by e-mail. The aim was to recruit two groups of about 10 students each. The message was sent to Haaga Institute's first year students and Perho Culinary school students who were still studying during the month of May, 2004. The message was sent to 60 students at Haaga Institute and 20 at Perho Culinary School.

All students joined the research voluntarily. The final sample of ten secondary education students from Perho Culinary School and seven already studying at Haaga Institute were invited to a neutral venue to discuss the subject of website branding. This sample enabled comparisons of the two groups to determine if brand associations of the website brand prior to, and following comparison to other polytechnic brands, varied between the two sample populations. The objective of the focus group interview was to determine students' image of Haaga Institute website and the impression it gave them.

As an incentive for participating, the Haaga Institute students were given ten points towards their Basics of Marketing course exam grade. Perho Culinary School students were given time off from their normal, course scheduled, microbiology course. The teacher gave them the alternative of participate or following the scheduled class.

The students were informed in advance that the study was about branding. More detailed instructions were given to the students during the session. The focus group interview was conducted in Finnish. During the study students were given a light snack to keep their sugar level balanced. The participants seemed to appreciate this very much as the study started at 4 pm and ended at 6 pm.

#### ***6.3.1 Demographics of the focus groups***

Background information on the students was gathered first with the aid of the Group Systems® survey tool (Appendix 1). This was a more convenient way than taking



notes from an open discussion among the participants of their age, domicile, marital status and earnings.

The participants for the focus group interview were both female and male students from Perho Culinary School (Perho) and Haaga Institute (HI). The group size of Perho students was ten, of which seven were female and three male, students. The HI group consisted of seven students, five male and two female. Altogether, the group was comprised of eight male and nine female students.

The age group of potential polytechnic students is 20-24. Six HI students fitted this profile; only one student was above it. All ten Perho students belonged to the target group.

The residences of the HI students were in Helsinki, except for one whose permanent home address is in Kotka. The Perho students also typically lived in Helsinki. Two students had a permanent address outside the Helsinki Metropolitan area, one in Hämeenlinna and one in Japan. One student each was resident in the nearby cities of Espoo, Vantaa or Kauniainen.

Five students of HI lived alone and paid their rent. One student had a student dormitory apartment and one shared a rental apartment with a friend. Six students of Perho lived alone and paid their rent. Two lived together with their parents and one had owned the apartment of residence. Two had rented an apartment and paid their rent jointly.

The earnings of the HI students fell in the range of 5001 to 10 000 euros a year. One student was earning between 10 001 and 15 000 euros and one student between 20 001 and 30 000 euros. Among Perho students, the lower range was changed to 5000 euros or less and in this bracket, the majority students, six, advised their earnings. Two students were had incomes between 10 001 and 15 000 euros, one between 5001 to 10 000 euros and one student between 15 001 and 20 000 euros.

The marital status of HI students was single for four students, one in a live-in relationship and one was engaged. The Perho students were mostly single (8), two informed a live-in relationship.

### *6.3.2 Background information related to work and entrepreneurship*

Most of the HI students had a full time job and two worked part-time prior to starting their studies at Haaga Institute. Nowadays, six students hold a full time job and one is working part-time while studying. The background education for HI students was vocational school for five students and high school for two.

The background education of the HI students' parents was an interesting element. If parents had different educations two alternatives were chosen. Three parents had a comprehensive school, three a vocational school, two university level education. One of the parents had completed high school and one the former college (in Finnish opistotaso) level education.

Students at Perho also worked in a full time job during their high school studies. Two had a part time job. At the time of the focus group interviews, the majority of students (7) held part time jobs. One was working full time, one was seeking full time employment and one was not searching for a job nor working at the moment. The background education of Perho students was high school for nine students and one had a vocational school education.

The majority of parents (5) of the Perho students had either a polytechnic or university level education. Four of the parents had completed comprehensive school, three vocational school, three high school and one, at college level.

When asked their attitude to entrepreneurship five Haaga students were somewhat interested in becoming an entrepreneur and two very interested. One had entrepreneurs among their relatives, four had few relatives as entrepreneurs and two had none. The general attitude on entrepreneurship among the majority of students (5) was relatively good, one student felt it was excellent and only one chose the



relatively bad option.

Perho Culinary School students were mostly interested in becoming entrepreneurs; five students were quite interested, three were somewhat interested and one revealed a genuine interest and one was not interested at all. The students advised that in general among their relatives there were only few entrepreneurs (5), three students informed that they had some relatives and two students did not have a single one. The general attitude towards entrepreneurship was quite good (6) or quite bad (4).

### *6.3.3 Information sources for polytechnic studies*

The purpose of the questions was to find out the kind of information source the potential students might be utilizing when looking for a polytechnic study place. Haaga students' answers were based on actual behaviour in the selection of a study place in the year 2002. As potential applicants, the Perho students were given the assumption: "If you are looking for a study place what would be the main source of information you would be seeking?"

Both focus groups had an list of 23 different electronic information sources. They were able to select the five most significant ones for this purpose; the top 5. The list of information sources included websites, printed media and own network e.g. parents, employers, co-workers.

All ten Perho students had among their top 5 the polytechnic website. The second most popular sources, with four votes, were: the website of the National Board of Education (NBE), asking friends, asking the high/secondary school study counsellor and visiting educational fairs. Three votes were given to contacting the polytechnic directly by phone or mail or using search engines e.g. Google. Two votes were given to Opintoluotsi- portal use, newspaper advertising, and employment service bureaux. Personal visit to the polytechnic was mentioned once, as well as the portal Koulutusnetti, website of Ministry of Labour, asking the employer, asking fellow employees and looking up information from the library.

The question was phrased differently for the Haaga students' focus group. They were asked in the past tense, as this was historical information for them. The students were given the option of choosing the five most significant information sources and ranking them in order of importance by grading them from the worst to the best - one to five points. The maximum of points each student could use was 15 points; the sum of 1-5. The total number of choices was the same as for the Perho students; 23. The computer of one participant was not registering the score so in the question, n= 6.

The results were spread with a total on 14,50 meaning that not all given resources were used. According to the results spread the lowest mean was 0, 50 and the highest mean was 3,33. The standard deviation of the question was 0,91. The total points given, the mean and the standard deviation, sorted in descending order, are shown in table 8.

Ranking	Choices	Total points	Mean	STD
1	Polytechnic website	20	3,33	1,86
2	Asking friends	18	3,00	2,10
3	Google search engine	10	1,67	1,86
4	Asking fellow employees	7	1,17	2,04
5	Educational fairs	5	0,83	1,60
6	Asking the employer	5	0,83	2,04
7	Some other way (not explained)	4	0,67	1,63
8	Website of NBE	4	0,67	0,84
9	Employment bureau	3	0,50	0,84
10	Contacting the polytechnic	3	0,50	1,22

**Table 7 Ranking of the most common source of information prior to the application to polytechnic**

The results illustrate how important students find the websites. Among the top 10 three on-line information sources were mentioned. Table 7 shows that the importance of friends and fellow employees cannot be neglected. Potential education possibilities are sought from educational fairs. There is a tendency in Finland among high schools and vocational schools for study counsellors to take students on a field trip to these educational fairs. Entrance is free of charge for them. Potential students



meet the representatives of higher education institutions, as well as current students. They can exchange ideas and ask questions about their future potential study place.

Only two students were very entrepreneurial and made contact either with the employment bureau or directly to the polytechnic they were interested in making application to. Again, this demonstrates the habits of young people to rely mostly on website information.

#### *6.3.4. Alternative plans and reputation of Haaga Institute*

When asking the Haaga Institute students if they had applied to some universities, only two students answered positively (applied to Helsinki University). Further education following polytechnic studies interested two students. One student mentioned Helsinki University and the Department of Applied Chemistry and Microbiology. That is the department for which Haaga Institute provides education for future Master's students in food chemistry. Yearly, ten students are selected for this specialisation. The studies are conducted both at Haaga Institute and the Swedish School of Economics. The study structure is ten credits, 15 ECTS credits.

The other student had been considering further studies following the completion of the polytechnic degree. This will be feasible for students upon graduation within the next two years ( by year 2006) as the Bologna agreement gives the opportunity to the polytechnics to offer Master's level degrees. The Finnish parliament is likely to approve the change in the higher education law in 2005. This degree in polytechnics has caused a lot of debate among university officials in Finland.

The first year Perho students were not sure about their plans. One had decided to continue in the University and one thought about polytechnic studies but was debating whether to study in Finnish or Swedish after a couple of years of work. One was happy with the degree offered in Perho and found it sufficient.

The students of Haaga Institute felt confident about their studies; their expectations were met. Only one felt that the prior image was too rosy. No student felt that the

expectations were exceeded. The reason for this might be that they have properly done their homework prior to applying to Haaga Institute.

The students of Perho were asked what the reputation of Haaga Institute is, in their opinion. Five of them felt that the studies are conducted in a very similar manner as in all other polytechnics. Four students felt that the industry values highly Haaga Institute graduates and one was not at all interested in continuing studies.

#### **6.4 Recognition of tourism, catering and institutional management polytechnics in Finland**

The first theme, after the background questionnaire was to recognize the tourism, catering and institutional management sector among all polytechnics in Finland. There are 31 polytechnics in Finland of which 23 offer the above mentioned degree programme in Finnish, Swedish or English.

From the given list the participants in the first focus group meeting, HI students, recognized Laurea, Haaga, Stadia, Jyväskylä, Turku and Rovaniemi. In the second focus group meeting with the Perho students Stadia, Laurea, Haaga, Pirkanmaa, Jyväskylä, Lahti and Turku were mentioned most often. All polytechnics received some votes.

It is obvious that in vocational school the awareness of polytechnic studies in the field of hotel, restaurant and tourism is better. The path from vocational education to polytechnic is very common, especially among Perho students to Haaga Institute. The result of recognition was also surprising as the majority of the Haaga Institute students had a vocational school background.

The students from Perho were asked how well they know the polytechnics offering the degree programmes in hotel, restaurant and tourism management. One had heard of South Carelia polytechnic, one student had several friends studying at Haaga Institute and had the intention of applying as well. One student mentioned that Stadia uses a lot of advertising and that they offer degree programmes in several different fields. Stadia was the most recognized due to its heavy advertising



campaign on the streets of Helsinki. One Perho student had friends in Häme polytechnic. One had applied to Laurea but is studying in Perho instead.

Haaga Institute student participants had received information from a friend studying at Stadia or Laurea polytechnic. Haaga was recognized through previous studies in the high school or vocational secondary education. Surprisingly, the study counselor in high school had little or no influence at all.

The Haaga Institute students were asked to list the other study field possibilities they had. Most of these participants were designated to the hotel, restaurant and tourism field. "We thought about studying either in Laurea, Stadia or Lahti polytechnic". Some other fields were also mentioned: environment design, media, advertising, radiography and radiotherapy, sociology, law enforcement, music, and psychology.

### **6.5 Rating of websites**

When planning for the focus group tasks, the author had selected three polytechnic websites to be discussed in detail. The selection criteria were based on previous studies conducted by Haaga Institute. Laurea Polytechnic (Laurea) is considered the biggest competitor within the Helsinki Metropolitan area and Jyväskylä Polytechnic (Jyväskylä) nationwide. Turku Polytechnic (Turku) has the same website application design as Haaga Institute Polytechnic. Both focus groups were divided into three smaller groups to review one of the selected website.

The students were given a written guideline (Appendix 3) on the topics to look at the websites and after ten minutes they were invited to the GroupSystems® Group Outliner tool (Appendix 2). The topics they were looking for were: contact information, applying, studying, modernity, internationality, liaisons with the industry, information search and overall grade for the website. The grades were marked on the paper from the worst to the best - one to five points.

Following that they shared their ideas with other subgroup members and wrote the plusses, minuses and other comments related to the website of a particular

polytechnic. The participants were able to see the answers of the subgroup they belonged to. After the guided electronic discussion of plusses and minuses of the website all three website discussions were briefed simultaneously with the entire focus group. The answers were discussed with the whole group before starting the next stage.

Finally all participants rated the website of Haaga Institute collectively. They were able to see all the answers simultaneously and the discussion was lively when someone posted an interesting or non-agreeable comment. In the next sections the author will elaborate the four websites discussion

#### *6.5.1 Laurea Polytechnic - <http://www.laurea.fi/net/fi>*

Haaga Institute students found the Laurea Polytechnic website clear and information easy to find. They found the general information. HI students also found the correct information on how to apply. They particularly noticed that Laurea markets their excellent industry liaisons. Students found it very useful to have a lot of links. Internationalization possibilities were seen as an attractive feature.

Perho students mentioned that the website was easy to read and the text and the backgrounds were in balance; clearly there was some emphasis in design. Laurea gave a modern flair and is also quite international. One student claimed that the polytechnic itself thinks it is international. The website has an abundance of information and there are many links taking the visitor further. Perho students were not able to find connections to the industry itself.

As negative features HI students found that there is much too much general information. They had difficulty finding information on the degree programme in tourism, catering and institutional management. They required more facts concerning the degree programme and how the studies are conducted. In their opinion the course outlines were not clear.

Perho students find the jargon used on the website somewhat confusing. They



claimed that the polytechnic used local idiom to communicate. The titles on the website were too broad and misleading. They would have preferred more detailed course outlines. In their opinion it was hard to find contact information. They mentioned also that the website used a too professional jargon for someone recently from high school. The words were too esoteric and complicated and did not belong to the vocabulary used by young people under 20. One student who had more experience with websites found all the necessary information without any problems. Some other Perho student mentioned that websites are always a compromise between information flow and impression management. Still they agreed that the operator should not be hidden more than "two- clicks" away.

As an interesting feature on the website, HI students mentioned the possibility to print forms and fill in forms on-line. Also they mentioned that the studies conducted in the Open Polytechnic Laurea were clear.

Perho students seemed to find more positive and interesting features from the Laurea pages than HI students. One student even mentioned the speed of loading the website and commented that it is feasible even with a lower speed modem. One Perho student found that the website was attractive and compared it to others he had visited in the past.

Suddenly the discussion took an interesting turn when someone mentioned Perho's website. They would not find anything positive from their own school website. They felt that the Perho website did not include any important message to them and they were struggling to determine why pages existed and to whom they existed. One student found the website very stylish. One thought the Perho website looked more like an advertising agency website than a culinary school. Someone suggested looking at [www.demi.fi](http://www.demi.fi). This website is targeted on young audiences with features and information they are interested in.

### *6.5.2 Jyväskylä Polytechnic - <http://www.jypoly.fi>*

Jyväskylä Polytechnic website gave the impression of being international. The HI students appreciated good contact information with maps. Services provided to students were clear. The degree programme in Tourism, Catering and Institutional Management included sufficient information. Overall they found the website easy to find information from. Contact information was easy to find.

Perho students were also impressed by this website. The information they were requested to look for was easy to find. The website was well constructed and the information was clearly defined. They liked the maps on the website.

This group of HI students was interested to find out how many students there are in Jyväskylä polytechnic and the number of graduates in 2003 or the previous year. They mentioned that there was a lot of general information but not really directed to potential students. Potential students might be interested in their opinion of the total number of applicants and how many of them are accepted this year. The website lacked photos of students. The descriptions of the degree programme in tourism, catering and institutional management were not clear.

Perho students on the other hand found the website very boring and traditional. They also mentioned that a few additional photos would have elaborated the website. They felt that the website served its purpose.

### *6.5.3 Turku Polytechnic - <http://www.turkuamk.fi>*

The HI students found the Turku Polytechnic website really clear. Contact information was easy to find. They found it interesting that on the website, this particular polytechnic advises about projects and how they are financed. The HI student group did not mention any weaknesses.



In their opinion the website gave a too positive picture of the polytechnic. One HI student group made some comments on the teaching level at Turku Polytechnic. They found the interviews with successful and happy students on the website very positive for potential students even if the truth might be different. In HI students' opinion the advertising on the website and in the radio were pathetic.

Perho students found the pages very clear. The information they were looking for was found without requiring a "frustration of clicking" on the website. The information was very easily accessible and the contact information at the foot of the page was in a perfect spot. The website of the Art and Media degree programme was mentioned as a confusing one. Someone tried to match information on the website with what had appeared recently in the newspaper; but without success.

The course outlines did not appear after the first "click", which was frustrating. The style of the website was very formal as in the majority of the polytechnics' websites. One mentioned that some of the links provided on the website were illegible. Perho students thought that the colours on the website were refreshing, it was similar to Ikea. One student admitted that experience is required to "click" on this particular website; a first - timer spends too much time on "clicking" and "re-clicking" if the information is under a jargon title.

#### *6.5.4 Haaga Institute Polytechnic – [www.haaga.fi](http://www.haaga.fi)*

HI students' attitude towards their own school's website was really good. They commented that the links provided were good. The library link was excellent. They started to compare the website with those they had rated earlier. Student services were better than in Laurea Polytechnic website. The course outlines were good. Search-link was good and it helped in finding information from the website. International affairs were well presented.

A Perho student who had visited the Laurea website earlier found Haaga Institute Website much clearer. Perho students felt that the pages were broad and easy to use. All the information they were looking for was found without difficulty. They

thought the website was very basic. Someone mentioned also that when the website has a distinct outline the information is also easier to find. Usability was considered better than on other polytechnics' websites.

HI students mentioned that it was an excellent idea to provide information on applicants and available study places. The layout of the website was suitable for a polytechnic. Some of the students did not know that job placement is available via the website (this service is available for students studying in the degree programme of business administration).

The students commented favourably on Edulink (the e-learning application used in Haaga Institute). They only wondered why teachers do not utilize it enough in teaching. They made the suggestion that Haaga Institute teachers should activate themselves and start using Edulink more. In their opinion it is nicer to work from home than sit in school. The opinion was not shared by everyone; other students preferred to study at school. They suggested that a right combination of reading a book and applying it to an exercise in Edulink might be useful.

Perho students liked especially the international office information and the possibility to see all the exchange schools with which Haaga Institute has a contract. With just one "click" they were browsing the website of the partner university. They also found Edulink an interesting way of studying in Haaga Institute. Perho students found the website very modern. Someone mentioned that there is too much information on the website and further "clicking" might result in confusion about what was the initial information one was looking for.

Perho students saw room for improvement in information flow and impression management. The website was not designed for young people. Someone mentioned that the Turku Polytechnic website was much more sympathetic. The colours of the website were not attractive and that visitors to the site might be deterred from staying connected to the website for a longer period. They commented that if the website is not attractive to visitors, they may be discouraged from returning to the website. In their opinion, the colours were 'old-fashioned'. Laurea had more modern colours and



the website was not so "tired".

In one instance all Perho students started to either mock the previous polytechnic pages or compare them with Haaga Institute pages. It was clear that comfort on the website for them was much more important than the information given. Also an active oral discussion started among the participants. After a while, the author in her role of motivator discontinued the conversation and suggested continuing with the next question.

HI's contact information was not located on the front page. Perho students thought that the website was from the 80's and designed for those who live in Espoo, owns a Volvo station wagon and still uses a mobile phone that fits in a briefcase. One student said that the informativeness is better than the lay-out of the website.

HI students were familiar with this website so they "clicked" around and searched for information they do not usually need. In their opinion the website of Continuing Education Haaga-Perho and Further education pages were not functioning according to their wishes. Someone mentioned that it took at least 15 attempts the first time the student tried to find the form to sign-up for the re-sit exam. Everybody in the group agreed that these forms should be much easier to access. Someone gave a shortcut to the problem and recommended using the search engine on the website. The student thought that there is too much coding on the website. The course codes are a nightmare for an applicant.

The HI students gave positive comments on the new methods to apply. They thought it was really modern to send an SMS-message to Haaga Institute and receive in return an application guide with the necessary form. Finally, they suggested that students studying in Haaga Institute should have their own website.

## **6.6 Haaga logo**

The participants of the focus groups were shown the following logo (figure 6) without the text "Haaga Polytechnic" showing only the letter "H". The logo was launched in

1998. The advertising agency created a story behind it: the pillars of the letter “H” represent cohesion between studying and industry liaison with a life long learning path in the middle. Both Haaga Institute and Perho students were asked to give opinions about this part of the Haaga Institute logo (circled in the picture below). This part is used only in the pin designed for Haaga Institute Polytechnic. In all other forms of marketing the use of the whole logo is compulsory.



**Figure 6. Haaga Institute Polytechnic official logo**

The students were asked to write with the Topic Commenter tool on what comes to their mind when they see the picture shown to them with the overhead projector.

The following comments were received:

*“Steps going up”.*

*” H like Haaga”.*

*“The pieces in the middle are connecting the student and work life. “*

*“Boring but friendly.”*

*“Hotels and restaurants. “*

*“I hope nobody was paid to design this logo. “*

*“Water of life, the color blue. “*

*“The logo alone without the word Haaga Polytechnic does not clearly depict the company,”*

Perho students expression were stricter. The first thing written was “factory” then it triggered “Soviet Union” and “Inflexible”. They could not figure out what the extra



parts in the letter H were all about. The logo was in their opinion a leftover from the 70's, used and old-fashioned. In their opinion the logo was not suitable for a polytechnic; it would have better suited a cigarette box. They suggested that the logo should be changed to something that relates more to the 21st Century.

Someone suggested that the logo looks like an elevator between different floors or a construction company. One student came up with the slogan "The sky is the limit when you get in to Haaga Institute".

Perho students preferred the butterfly logo of Culinary School Perho. In their opinion it was cute. As the students were shown the logo without the written part, "Haaga Polytechnic", most of them did not at first recognize it. A similar kind of test was conducted a some years ago among world famous logos and the "M" of McDonalds' was the most recognized logo in the world, beating even the Christian Cross and the Islamic Half Moon as religious symbols. For that reason, the author took the liberty of testing also the Haaga Institute Polytechnic logo without the proper text.

### **6.7 Haaga's website as marketing tool**

One question was designed to test whether the website supports the other marketing efforts made by Haaga Institute polytechnic. The answers were given on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 - I disagree totally (1) to I agree totally (5).

The Vote tool of GroupsSystems® was used for this question. (Appendix 2). The statements and their means (by Perho students) are shown in table 8 by the ten Perho students:

Rank	Choices	Mean	STD
1	Haaga website supports the advertising	4,00	0,58
2	Technology is making all products similar. Products are easy to copy. A permanent competitive advantage can be gained only by long-term customer relations	4,00	0,58
3	The words spreads out easily in the Internet	4,00	1,15
4	Haaga website supports the publicity and public relations	3,43	0,79
5	Haaga website gives a "flagship" impression	3,43	0,98
6	The Internet is transferring power to the customers	3,43	0,98
7	The Internet is endless and to recognize Haaga brand is very hard	3,43	1,13
8	The Internet is a very sterile environment, people are questioning and doubting the brands	3,29	0,76
9	Consumers are less loyal to the brand. The next brand is just a click away	2,71	1,60
10	The Internet is productive for people who are looking for information. They cannot be fooled, they are requesting for quality	2,57	0,79

**Table 8 Perho students' opinions to marketing statements (mean and STD)**

The strongest opinions (either I agree totally or I somewhat agree) were in response to the question related to whether Haaga's website supports the advertising in general. The second strongest opinion was on the statement that products are easy to copy. The same response was received by the question regarding whether the website supports the PR efforts of Haaga Institute.

The least agreed statements were: the Internet is productive for people who are looking for information. They cannot be fooled, they are requesting quality, and four students felt that they could only somewhat agree with the statement. Two students felt that companies are not transferring power to the consumers. The statements and their means (by Haaga students) are shown in table 9 by the seven Haaga students.



Rank	Choices	Mean	STD
1	Technology is making all products similar. Products are easy to copy. A permanent competitive advantage can be gained only by long-term customer relations	4,10	0,57
2	The words spreads out easily in the Internet	3,90	0,99
3	Haaga website supporting publicity and public relations	3,70	0,95
4	Internet is a very sterile environment, people are questioning and doubting the brands	3,60	0,97
5	Haaga website supports the advertising	3,60	1,07
6	Consumers are less loyal to the brand. The next brand is just a click away	3,40	0,70
7	The Internet is endless and to recognize Haaga brand is very hard	3,40	0,84
8	Internet is transferring power to the customers	3,20	1,48
9	Internet is productive for people who are looking for information. They cannot be fooled, they are requesting quality	3,00	1,33
10	Haaga website give a "flagship" impression	2,80	1,23

**Table 9 Haaga students' opinions to marketing statements (mean and STD)**

Haaga's students felt that technology is making all products similar. The properties of the products are very easy to copy. A competitive advantage is achieved only through long-term customer relationships. Word of mouth is spread easily on the Internet.

Haaga's website supports its marketing actions and public relations. Haaga's website introduces the "flagship" effect to the polytechnic world. The Internet is transferring power from companies to consumers. It is hard to get enough visibility on the Internet. The Internet is a very sterile environment; consumers often contradict and doubt brands. Consumers are less loyal to the brand. The brand of the competitor is just a click away. The Internet is luring consumers that are interested in information. One cannot equivocate with them. They demand quality.

Haaga Institute students, on the other hand, felt that the website supports other advertising. The question regarding the technology was received with the same interpretation. They felt that it is making all products look alike. Finally the same mean rating, 3.90, was given to word-of-mouth on the Internet.

The mean 3.43 was evenly spread among the PR, flagship impression, customer power and the endless feature of the Internet. The smallest means were among sterility (3,29), brand loyalty (2,71) and quality (2,57).

## **6.8 Summary of the focus group interviews**

The focus group data illustrate that both Haaga and Perho students are used to utilizing the Internet as source of information. They were both familiar with the brand "Haaga" which might have caused a biased reaction.

On the other hand the study done in the Internet Fall 2004, proved that the Haaga Institute Polytechnic website is relatively well constructed. Uranus Konsultointi ([www.uranus.fi](http://www.uranus.fi)) did the study on the website during the period of June 16<sup>th</sup> and September 15<sup>th</sup> 2004. 30 education providers were evaluated. Each visitor evaluated four units on a scale of 1-5 how attractive the education given seems to be. The website was visited 45 000 times and 15 000 filled in the evaluation form. Haaga won the second prize in the general class, after Helsinki University. The first prize among the polytechnics was awarded to Haaga Institute. (Uranus, 2004)

In general the Uranus-website visitors valued the following issues: ease of use and clarity, quality of information, outlook, technique and details. Haaga Institute Polytechnic's website was appreciated for the large quantity of information presented in a clear and interesting way. The colourful website encouraged potential students to "click" further. The menu on the website is clear and information was easy to find. (Uranus, 2004)



## **7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Branding has been one of the hottest marketing topics over the past few years also in Finland. Adding to that the Internet's explosive growth, the higher education sector has begun to identify new recruiting challenges arising out of the intersection of these two forces. These non-profit organizations are recognizing the value and importance of using their brands to improve performance and build strong relationships with their existing and potential customers.

With the proliferation of competitors and products and services that are easily duplicated or replaceable, brands become an important means of simplifying the decision-making process for potential students. The website offers the suitable source of information as the generation of 20-24 year olds are used to the Internet and know it as a reliable. They are the segment chosen to the study. This age group is looking for a higher education study place after their high school or secondary education.

When brands are managed properly, brands create difference, relevance and affinity. Branding helps decision making to become easier. This way, branding delivers a very important message. A strong brand will help the customers trust and create a set of expectation about the service provider. (Collin & Porras, 1994)

According to this study the brand should be also recognized on the website as: "name that means satisfaction, quality and value to the customer". Higher education institutions such as polytechnics should understand young peoples' needs; deliver superior quality on attributes that matter to them. An effective image building is one of the steps that is leading to a customer-focused branding.

Branding culture is not yet strongly embedded in higher education institutions. The challenge is how the intangibility and invisibility of educational services can be visualized. Do customers require brands in educational services? Do prospects understand the message educational institutions are sending from the brands? Is

branding an important factor in competition among educational institutions in the future?

The data from the focus group interviews correlates with the theoretical background chosen for this study. Focus group methodology is one of several tools to generate valid information relevant to the higher education institutions such as polytechnics. The focus group sizes were appropriate to the suggestion given in the literature (7-10 participants). The focus group is a type of group interview where its social, semi-public nature of methodology shapes the data and the purpose that it serves. (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

In our focus group sessions, the participants were able to give their own contribution to the conversation with the computer, producing the data analysed in this study. Haaga and Perho students typed in the answers that were displayed on the data projector screen visible to everyone. This was serving its purpose the same way as in a more traditional focus group interviews where the answers are either taped or manually written down by the motivator.

The author as motivator was able to read not only the written production of focus group discussion, but also to capture the emotions, ironies, contradictions, and tensions. Haaga and Perho students were able to say anything they liked in focus groups sessions. The two focus group interviews provided the author with unexpected situations where the conversation started to deviate from the actual topics. The atmosphere was motivating and they were free to express themselves openly. That led to one incident where Perho students took advantage of the situation, while evaluating the polytechnics' websites, finding several deficiencies from their own school website. The motivator had to direct them back to the topic of this case study.

The rationale of the focus group interview usually is to find out possible information for further research. The actual situation of the interview is very demanding and requires a high level of concentration from the participants. The length of the session cannot exceed two hours. In order to keep the focus group motivated towards the



case only specific topics can be discussed during the interview session. For this reason the website usability was not taken into consideration in this study, although usability has an important role in customer-focused websites. The young people follow certain patterns when searching for information on the website. Also the concept of brand is more familiar to them than to the older generation. (Quart, 2003)

This suggests that the power of reputation for a brand is strongest when the competitive products all look alike or cannot be seen explicitly, as in the case of higher education institutions. The wide choice of higher education study places available to high school and secondary education graduates makes it difficult to select the potential study place. That is why the website of these institutions needs to be both appealing and informative.

As the website is a significant source of information for young people, the higher education institutions are required to pay more attention to the impression management. It is important to maintain a high level of differentiation among the websites in order to induce the potential students to apply. According to this study the right balance between information and attractiveness of the website is essential. The brand built by the website of the higher education institution must create expectations that can be met. The text and the pictures should portray a realistic image of the higher education institutions; a promise that is delivered during the studies.

The existing reputation of the higher education institution has a strong impact while selecting the potential study places. The awareness of a certain higher education institution helps potential students to find easily more information from the website. If they do not know or do not believe in the reputation of the polytechnic or university, they might not even take the first look at the website. The potential students visiting the website for the first time should get the desired impression in order to "click" further and look for more information. Otherwise they might not take a second look.

Managers must constantly work hard on maintaining reputation. Managers must also think twice about not living up to their commitments with the duration and magnitude

of the penalty for not living up to their signalled intentions. A mixed signal has a negative impact seven to ten times that of a true signal. It therefore takes many positive transactions to restore a company's reputation to where it was before the mixed signal occurred. Constant attention to the product, service, and customers must be given to maintain an established reputation over the long term. (Clancy & Trout , 2002)

The first thing that both polytechnic and universities have in common is their ability and focus on setting out a clear and inspiring vision for the institution with very challenging ambitions. Collins and Porras (1994), claim that they are "time tellers." In their view, building any company that can prosper beyond the presence of any single leader and through multiple product life cycles is like "clock building."

The main message about brand equity for Haaga Institute website is that it must be built over time rather than created instantaneously with heavy spending. Within marketing, branding has a more specific meaning and is typically defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these, which is used to identify the goods and services of one service provider and to differentiate them from those of competitors. (Kotler et al. 1999)

The findings of the study were limited by the fact that the sample size was only 17 students. With a larger number of students or potential students a clearer picture will be received on polytechnic branding. This could be a suitable topic for further research on Haaga Institute website.

The findings of this study suggest that students that attend Haaga Institute perceive brand awareness on the website differently than students that attend the Perho Culinary School. Conclusions suggest that companies desiring to make brand awareness more feasible on the Web should take into consideration their target population prior to preparing the content in the website and introducing all the possibilities of the interactiveness in order to reinforce the visibility and understanding of the brand



According to this study the website should be an integral part of all polytechnic's marketing campaigns and communications programs. The website should appear on every piece of correspondence and marketing collateral the polytechnic generates. Website is part of the integrated marketing communication.

Haaga Institute should find more opportunities to cross-promote the website with affiliated businesses, professional organizations, broadcast or print media, visitor or local information agencies, Internet access providers, and local city directory sites. Haaga Institute could also feature school events on the website.

Executives at Haaga Institute need to understand one point with crystal clarity: the brand is communicated with every customer interaction. From the promotions, to the documentation, to the technical support, right down to the cheerfulness of the teachers'— the brand is defined, projected, enforced or depleted. The website is just the gate to this, but an important one!

Defining the brand is the easy part. The ongoing job is to drive that brand through every part of the organization and any organization that works on the behalf, such as the channels. The future for Haaga Institute Polytechnic looks promising as a project to reform its website continues and should be ready by August 2005.

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## **INTERNET SOURCES:**

### **Online advertising guide:**

<http://advertising.msn.com/adproducts/onlineadguide.asp>

### **Taloustutkimus Oy:**

<http://toy.fi>

### **GVU's user survey:**



[http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user\\_surveys/survey-1998-04/reports/](http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-04/reports/)

**Haaga Institute Polytechnic**

<http://www.haaga.fi>

**Laurea Polytechnic**

<http://www.laurea.fi/net/fi/>

**Jyväskylä Polytechnic**

<http://www.jypoly.fi>

**Turku Polytechnic**

<http://www.turkuamk.fi>

**Opetusministeriö – Ministry of Education**

<http://www.minedu.fi/minedu/education/index.html>

**Arene**

<http://www.arene.fi/english/>

**National Board of Education**

[vos.uta.fi/rap/vos/v04/v04yt7s04.html](http://vos.uta.fi/rap/vos/v04/v04yt7s04.html)

**GroupSystems Inc.**

<http://www.groupsystems.com/>

**Uranus Konsultointi**

<http://www.uranus.fi>

**INTERVIEW:**

Timo Moilanen, Director of Development Haaga Institute 14.1.2004

Mari Häkkinen, Student Affairs Officer, Haaga Institute 16.4.2004 & 11.6.2004

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1- GroupSystems® tools



**Categorizer.** Used to collect a list of ideas, then categorize those ideas into logical groupings. The group can brainstorm on one single list, or enter ideas directly into the categories. Common uses include cause and effect analysis; organizing lists of tasks; and simple brainstorming.



**Vote :** Eight voting methods, including a customizable point scale, make the voting process flexible and powerful. Used to evaluate, make decisions, and build consensus



**Group Outliner:** Used to generate and/or organize ideas into a familiar hierarchical structure. Outlines can be displayed in bulleted or numbered format. The leader can distribute the whole outline to participants, or allow them to work in subgroups. Common uses include action planning; group writing; and process design



**Topic Commenter:** The leader enters a list of topics and asks participants to comment on those topics. Common uses include discussing strengths and weaknesses (SWOT analysis) and focus group research



**Alternative Analysis:** Used to evaluate a list of alternatives based on multiple criteria. Sophisticated charting allows for in-depth analysis. Common uses include evaluating job candidates; assessing risks; rating vendor proposals; and evaluating options



**Electronic Brainstorming:** Used for simultaneous and anonymous idea sharing on a specific question or issue. Common uses include team building; broad or focused brainstorming; and visioning or strategic planning sessions



**Survey :**Used to build, distribute, and collect survey forms. Common uses include employee feedback surveys; 360 performance reviews; and customer surveys



## APPENDIX 2

List of polytechnics in Finland with the degree programme in Tourism, Catering and Institutional management



- 1) Arcada polytechnic
- 4) Laurea-polytechnic
- 5) South –Carelian polytechnic
- 6) Haaga Institute polytechnic
- 7) Helia polytechnic
- 8) Helsinki polytechnic- Stadia
- 10) Häme polytechnic
- 11) Jyväskylä polytechnic
- 12) Kajaani polytechnic
- 14) Centre ostarbothinia polytechnic
- 16) Lahti polytechnic
- 17) Mikkeli polytechnic
- 19) Pirkanmaa polytechnic
- 20) North –Carelian polytechnic
- 21) North –Savo polytechnic
- 23) Rovaniemi polytechnic
- 24) Satakunta polytechnic
- 25) Seinäjoki polytechnic
- 28) Turku polytechnic
- 29) Vaasa polytechnic
- 30) Sydväst polytechnic
- 31) Åland polytechnic

Source Arene 2004

(the numbers represent the location of the polytechnic on the map)

## APPENDIX 3 ( the questionnaire used to rank the websites)

Käytä seuraavaa vastausasteikkoa!

1= erittäin huono (EH)

2= huono (Hu)

3= melko huono/hyvä (MHu/MHy)

4= hyvä (Hy)

5= erittäin hyvä (EHH)

	EHu	Hu	MHu/MHy	Hy	EHy
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>MERKITSE VASTAUKSESI esim. melko hyvä</b>			MHy		

### HAAGA INSTITUUTTI

	EHu	Hu	MHu/MHy	Hy	EHy
<b>1.Haaga Instituutin yhteystiedot</b>					
<b>2.Opiskeluun hakeutuminen: informaation saanti</b>					
<b>3.Opiskelu: vaativuustaso, kurssikuvaukset, opinnoista kertominen</b>					
<b>4.Oppilaitoksen nykyaikaisuus</b>					
<b>5.Oppilaitoksen kansainvälisyys</b>					
<b>6.Työmarkkinayhteydet</b>					
<b>7.Muu tiedonsaanti sivuilta</b>					
<b>8.Yleisarvosana sivuille</b>					



## APPENDIX 4 AGENDA – BRAND & IMAGE FOCUS GROUP MEETING

### Meeting Objective

Tämän ryhmähaastattelutilaisuuden tarkoituksena on saada vertailuryhmätietoa Haaga Instituutin opiskelijoilta Pirkko Salon brändiä ja markkinointiviestintää koskevaan tutkimukseen, sekä samalla testata haastattelutehtävien toimivuutta. Kaikki kommentit ovat tervetulleita!

26.4.2004 & 5.5. 2004

- 16:00 Tervetuloa ryhmähaastattelutilaisuuteen!**  
Pirkko Salo esittelee aluksi tilaisuuden tarkoituksen ja Johanna Bragge käytettävän GroupSystems työvälineen
- 16:05 Taustakysely (Survey)**  
Aluksi kysymme tilastotietoja tutkimuksellisiin tarkoituksiin (vastaukset nimettöminä!)
- 16:15 MaRaTa -tutkinto (Vote)**  
Missä voi mielestäsi opiskella Matkailu- ja ravitsemisalan ammattikorkeakoulututkinnon?
- 16:25 MaRaTa koulujen tunnettuus (Vote)**  
Mitkä MaRaTa -koulut tunsit entuudestaan?
- 16:35 Muut harkitut koulutusvaihtoehdot (Topic Commenter)**  
Mitä muita amk-koulutusvaihtoehtoja mietit ennen Haaga Instituuttiin tuloasi?
- 16:45 AMK A:n kotisivut**  
Osa ryhmästä tarkastelee AMK A:n kotisivuja erillisten ohjeiden mukaan
- 16:49 AMK B:n kotisivut**  
Osa ryhmästä tarkastelee AMK B:n kotisivuja erillisten ohjeiden mukaan
- 16:53 AMK C:n kotisivut**  
Osa ryhmästä tarkastelee AMK C:n kotisivuja erillisten ohjeiden mukaan
- 16:57 MaRaTa AMK:jen kotisivut (Group Outliner)**  
Arvioimme valittujen ammattikorkeakoulujen www-sivujen hyviä ja huonoja puolia
- 17:12 Haaga AMK:n kotisivut**  
Tarkastelemme Haaga AMK:n www-sivuja erillisten ohjeiden mukaan
- 17:22 Haaga Instituutin kotisivut (Group Outliner)**  
Arvioimme Haaga Instituutin kotisivujen hyviä ja huonoja puolia
- 17:37 Haaga Instituutin Ammattikorkeakoulun logo (Topic Commenter)**  
Mitä mielleyhtymiä Haagan logo herättää?
- 17:42 Markkinointiviestintä ja brändit (Vote)**  
Oletko samaa vai eri mieltä seuraavista väittämistä?
- 17:52 Palautekysely (Survey)**
-